University of Alberta

An Ethnographic Study of the Edmonton Hip Hop Community: Anti-Racist Cultural Identities

by

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Abstract

Past ethnographic studies have focused on defining the cultural authenticity of the hip hop subcultures, this study attempts to examine the cultural practice of hip hop and the hybrid nature of the culture. This dissertation is an ethnographic study of the Edmonton hip hop community, fifteen local artists involved in rap music were interviewed in eight semi-structured interviews conducted in the fall 2003, interviewees were youth from diverse cultural backgrounds. This study examines how the community occurs within the context of Canadian multiculturalism, and the racialization and racism of ethnic minorities. The results of this study reveal how artists identify with hip hop as a culture in itself. It becomes apparent that hip hop culture holds utopian ideals of seeing past racial differences and that identities are formed around the social space of music. The community's colorblind philosophy and dislike of racial categorization, point to a potential anti-racist politic.

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Introduction

> "The invented traditions of musical expression which are my object here are equally important in the study of diaspora blacks and modernity because they have supported the formation of a distinct, often priestly caste of organic intellectuals whose experiences enable us to focus upon the crisis of modernity and modern values with special clarity. These have often been intellectuals in the Gramscian sense, operating without the benefits that flow either from the relationship to the modern state or from secure institutional locations within the cultural industries. They have often pursued roles that escape categorization as the practice of either legislator or interpreters and have advanced instead as temporary custodians of distinct and embattled cultural sensibility which has also operated as a political and philosophical resource. The irrepressible rhythms of the once forbidden drum are often still audible in their work. It's characteristic syncopations still animate the basic desires- to be free and to be oneself- that are revealed in this counterculture's unique conjunction of body and music." (Gilroy 1993: 76)

I remember when I was interviewing Arlo, I would ask a question and he would give me a long answer. Most of my interviews followed this fashion, each artist I interviewed tended to go on long explanations or rants, to them I got the sense that they were more like commonsensical philosophies on life. Although transcribing Arlo's interview was a lengthy tedious task, listening to him talk at the time of the interview made me feel honored. Arlo spoke about the need for "the community" to unite, misrepresentations of black people in media, his love of the music and his enjoyment of volunteer work.

I remember when I first met Stray, about three years ago. It was the night I discovered the essence of the local hip hop scene. I was always a hip hop junkie looking for a place to dance and listen to the most recent jams, and I had heard that there might be some people in the city who rapped, but it wasn't until I walked into a club down a dark alley, that I discovered Edmonton hip hop. The club was just off of Jasper Ave and it was called Lush, and every Saturday night they played 'old school' and underground rap in

the basement. People there would get hyped up about the music, local emcees would freestyle and battle, the DJ would spin the night away on the turntable and break dancers would impressively take over the floor. What I loved the most about this scene was the diversity of the crowd. I noticed that Edmonton emcees and break dancers were from various backgrounds, most that I had met or heard of were Black, Caucasian, Asian or Aboriginal. It was in this grimy basement that I befriended Stray. Stray was a Nechi[1] emcee I had heard of from my friends. Stray's seriousness and dedication to his music and his self-proclaimed Nechi identity drew me to the hip hop community[2]. His enthusiasm for writing rhymes and mixing beats, allowed me to appreciate him as an artist and intellectual. As artists Stray and Alro dislike stereotypical categorization, operating in the margins of the state and formal institutions, both are close to being the organic intellectuals Gilroy talks about.

I remember growing up on the reserve, falling asleep on my parents couch listening to my father play the guitar, singing gospel music in his soothing deep voice. My parents are Pentecostal Christians who sing in church. My mother is a member of a choir, composed of herself and most of my aunts. Acoustic instruments, drums and gospel hymns are the sounds of my childhood. My brothers play acoustic instruments and one of them even writes his own lyrics. My sister is a soprano vocalist, a youth choir director and student of music, and every week she talks to me about 'finding herself'. My sister is the only member of my family formally trained in music, all my other family members 'taught themselves'. Growing up there was always someone singing or playing music in my household, at times it was comforting and nice, at other times it was outright annoying.

My qualitative research with the Edmonton hip hop community is influenced by my experiences with hip hop music, my relationship with music, theories of racialization in Canada and Black popular culture, and my interactions with local artists.

In this thesis, I ask how local identities of race and culture negotiated between Canadian ethnic minority youth, within the global context of Canadian hip hop and within the context of hip hop's cultural history of expressing the voice of the marginalized? I question how scholars have thought race, culture and identities are represented through hip hop vs. the way cultural practitioners of hip hop feel about race, culture and identity within the subculture. I question how Edmonton artists articulate race and racialization within hip hop culture. I question how the practice of hip hop influences the artists identity and their understanding of race.

The first chapter of this thesis questions the academic study of the cultural authenticity of hip hop. Specifically how the cultural authenticity of hip hop has been traditionally validated in comparison to the ghetto-blackness of African American hip hop. The chapter explores how culture has been socially constructed by intellectuals. Following this criticism I examine how the study of black culture is reduced to coping mechanisms. In this discussion the hybridity and internal differences within black culture are emphasized. To examine the way the cultural authenticity of hip hop is validated, the ethnographic study of global localized practices of hip hop are discussed, and the generalization of hip hop as an imitation of African American hip hop is questioned. The chapter is concluded by describing globalized hip hop as a translation of mainstream popular culture and local cultural expression. The hybrid nature of culture is emphasized and hip hop is considered as a form of cultural translation.

The second chapter attempts to situate Edmonton hip hop in a cultural and geographic location. The local subculture is situated within the Canadian policy of multiculturalism. The resulting process of racialization and racism towards ethnic others is described. Then the history of cultural collaborations done across lines of race and ethnicity within hip hop are described, situating the local scene within a culture that has historically brought together youth of diverse backgrounds. Finally, the artists are situated within Edmonton, a prairie province far from the media 'mecca' of Toronto, yet thriving among a growing national subculture.

The third chapter describes the qualitative methods used in this study and why they were chosen. First, the interview data used in this study is explained, describing the general demographics of interviewees. Secondly, I described my entrance into the Edmonton hip hop community. In describing the constant process of entrance, I will specifically discuss my relationships with two key informants and their help in my entrance. Thirdly, I described the snowball sampling technique I used in finding interviewees, and how I came to recognize the size and diversity of the subculture. Fourthly, I explain my method of transcribing interview data and the process of interpretation in such a tedious task. Fifthly, I describe the informed consent and anonymity of my interviewees, specifically my decision to use the interviewees stage names in the study. Finally, I will describe my social position as a researcher. Describing how my race, gender, education and age influence my insider and outsider positions in researching the Edmonton hip hop community.

The fourth chapter presents the actual ethnographic results, focusing on the idea of community. I begin by describing events, businesses and establishments where hip hop

culture is sold and promoted in the city. Next, I describe the concept of "community" held by the Edmonton hip hop community, using my interview with Arlo Maverick. Through my interview with Arlo I will explain the discourse of community used by hip hop artists in Edmonton. I will illustrate the discourse used by the Edmonton hip hop community by describing the structure of the community and similar visions of the past, present and future held by local artists; how hip hop crews form, the sense of hip hop history, the need for positive images of youth in the Black community, the volunteers who maintain the community, and the vision of unity for the hip hop community. And finally, I discuss recent discussion towards the city of Edmonton getting an Urban radio station and the highly racialized term "Urban music". To discuss Urban radio and Urban music I use excerpts from interviews with several artists. Exploring recent discussions over an Edmonton Urban radio station and Urban music in Canada, gives more understanding to how hip hop artists in Edmonton situate themselves in the international pop music market and how hip hop artists understand the racialization of their art form in a capitalist market.

In the fifth chapter I examine how hip hop is considered a culture in itself, within the Edmonton community. Through the interviews with War Party, Dangerous Goods Collective and Shogun Entertainment, I examine cultural beliefs and norms within hip hop surrounding the concept of race. In order to explore the idea of hip hop as a culture, I begin with the ideas surrounding a distinctly Canadian hip hop culture and the question of whether or not hip hop belongs to anyone.

I discuss how Edmonton artists describe what makes Canadian hip hop distinct and how it fits in the global culture of hip hop. I will use the interviews with DGC and

Shogun to demonstrate how Edmonton hip hop artists explain Canadian hip hop culture as politically correct and in opposition to American popular culture. Next, I describe the way Edmonton hip hop artists identified with hip hop as a culture, and how they felt about the idea of hip hop belonging to any specific race or culture. The interview with War Party will demonstrate how hip hop can be used to empower Native youth and the complexities of identity in the context of colonization, religion, ethnic culture, racial identities, and hip hop culture. The interview with Dangerous Goods Collective will demonstrate how hip hop exists despite cultural and ethnic differences in the group. As well, how hip hop as a culture is believed to have evolved past race and how hip hop music can be considered a translatable language. The artists in these interviews identify with hip hop as a culture in itself and certain beliefs about race relations emerge through their dialogue. It becomes apparent that hip hop culture holds ideals of seeing past racial differences and that identities are formed around the social space of music. The hybrid nature of hip hop, global cross-cultural evolution of the popular music and the Edmonton hip hop community's colorblind philosophy and dislike of racial categorization, point to an underlying anti-racist politic.

Endnotes

[1] It has been my experience within Edmonton and among local Aboriginal youth that the Cree kin term has been re-appropriated to mean 'fellow Native person'. Among Edmonton Aboriginal youth, regardless of cultural background Nechi is used to refer to fellow Native brothers and sisters.

[2] It has been my observation through discussions with local hip hop artists and fans, attending local shows and listening to Edmonton radio stations, that the local hip hop subculture describes itself as a "hip hop community".

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Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Chapter 1: The Cultural Authenticity of Hip Hop

Listen to my words, are they full of cultural authenticity?
Am I really authentically me? Will you listen to my poetry only if I am poor with ghettocentricity? Does my reserve marginality mean I'll have ghetto sensitivity or do I have to be a male emcee that has come out of slavery? Or is even slavery enough history? Are my words only heard if they are represent ghettocentricity? Should I be Chinese, or a Latina or black- yellin' listen to me! Or should my rhyme be filled with afrocentricity, or misogyny, or will you listen if I tell you I am a vexed female nechi? What does it mean to have voice, and to be taken seriously?
Are my words enough to be authentically me? Will you listen if I tell you I have brown skin and come from a history of being displaced and I'm now living in postcoloniality? Is this cultural authenticity? Will you hear my voice if I am postindustrial city white working class, or will you ignore my broke ass? Or will you only notice me if I have a small waist, large breasts and round enough ass? Or can I get by on witty attitude and class?
Are my words enough to be authentically me? Will the authenticity of the pitch and tone of my voice set me free? Do I need to be an authentic museum artifact or a cultural object of study to be taken seriously? All this cultural authenticity shouldn't need so much complexity. Is it not enough to say I am angry with the government imposing poverty on my fellow nechi- telling him to get lost and to stop asking for money, meanwhile ignoring their apartheid-like reservation policy?
Listen to me, you and me have cultural authenticity! Because there is no one else who can possibly be authentically like me. There is no one else who experiences the same exact situation of history, complexity and marginality. No one else lives inside the same female mind or body. I am authenticity.

When I was first considering the idea of cultural authenticity in hip hop culture and particularly rap music, I wrote the above poem to try to come to terms with the imaginary knowledge dictators in my own head and out there, who try to define culture by its authenticity. In the above poem I struggled with the idea of myself as a poet and the terrible thoughts that my words might be judged by someone in terms of their cultural authenticity. Absurd facts of who I am and where I am from will be taken into consideration when judging the authenticity of my words. Who I am and what my words

convey will be all used for or against me when judging the cultural authenticity of my own poetry.

The above poem was influenced by my own experiences as a writer and by my academic interest in hip hop music. After reading about some ethnographic studies I begin to question the way in which academics have written about different hip hop movements and the way in which they translate specific hip hop artists as culturally authentic, often spending most of their arguments in defense of the hip hop artists authenticity. What struck me the most in these defenses of globally dispersed localized forms of hip hop culture is was how academics defined cultural authenticity. Most of these discussions on localized forms of hip hop cultures defined cultural authenticity from relating to African American hip hop culture. African American ghetto authenticity is set up as an ideal against which all other forms of hip hop is compared.

Hip hop is a youth subculture that emerges out of three main art forms of expression; break dancing, graffiti, and rap music. My main concern in here is with rap music. Rap music is what emerges out of the lyrical poetic speech of rapping with a DJ providing beats in the background, spinning and scratching on a turntable. Rapping can be improvised during a freestyle battle on stage, or in a scripted studio recording session. According to intellectuals hip hop is a cultural expression of a marginalized identity, I believe what it means to practitioners of the culture may be more complex than this.

Hip hop has been referred to as "a way of life" and a metaphoric "love of my life" by artists. The following lyrics by Tribe Called Quest and Roots, demonstrate how hip hop can be referred to as a culture, a way of life and as a love affair by cultural practitioners:

"Hip hop...a way of life
It doesn't tell you how to raise a child or treat a wife "(*Keep It Moving*, Tribe Called Quest)

"Hip hop she's the love of my life" (*Act Too: Love of My Life*, Roots)

But when intellectuals consider hip hop it is viewed as a cultural expression of identity. According to Tricia Rose, the "primary thematic concerns" of hip hop style and rap music are "identity and location" (Rose 1994:10). When hip hop culture is examined across the globe from Cape Town to L.A, identity and cultural authenticity are defined in terms of local experiences expressed in the lyrics of rap music. In this chapter, I will be exploring the difference between the academic account of hip hop that searches for cultural authenticity and the understanding of hip hop as a culture (a way of life and the love of one's life), hybrid and translatable in nature. Hip hop is not merely a coping mechanism as some academics accounts reduce it to, in this thesis I will show how hip hop is a hybrid, translatable form of popular art that collectively embodies an anti-racist class consciousness.

To examine the global cultural phenomena of hip hop culture and it's localized forms I will be focusing on rap music, drawing from various hip hop scenes that have been documented. These documented hip hop scenes include: Cape Town's hip hop scene among black and "coloured" youth in Cape Flats (Watkins 2001); the hip hop culture among white working class youth in the city of Newcastle upon Tyne in the U.K (Bennet 1999a); and the local Turkish and Moroccan hip hop artists in Frankfurt am Main, Germany (Bennet 1999b).

In order to consider hip hop cultural authenticity, I will use Benjamin's definitions and theory of translation and translatability (Benjamin 1969) when

considering the way in which local hip hop heads have translated hip hop into a cultural form. I will also draw on Bauman's examination of the concept of culture, particularly the way in which 'culture' and 'cultural difference' were constructed and used as theoretical tools in order to frame the world for Western intellectual thought (Bauman 1992). As well, I will draw from Kelley's critique of the academic fascination (and often simplistic misinterpretation) of black cultural expression, and the social scientist's search for the 'authentic Negro' of the ghetto underclass (Kelley 1997). Bauman's and Kelley's critiques of the Western intellectual and social science definitions of culture will be useful when considering the debates about the cultural authenticity of different hip hop subcultures.

Why consider hip hop and cultural authenticity? What defines the cultural authenticity of hip hop? Hip hop authenticity has been defined through a rap artist's personal identification with some sort of local social or political marginality, particularly a marginalized race or class. However, I am not deterministically saying that marginality equals hip hop authenticity. In the discussion that follows, I will demonstrate how hip hop artists, the hip hop audience/community, and intellectuals have constructed hip hop authenticity. Particularly, how hip hop artist's have constructed hip hop cultural authenticity by creating ties with African American rap. Often times those involved in a local hip hop scene will identify similarities with the original hip hop scene which began among the displaced population of the South Bronx among marginalized black and Latino youth (Rose 1994:4); hip hop artists identify with the first hip hop artist's racial, economic, and political marginalization.

1.1 Hip Hop Authenticity and The Validation for Ghetto-Blackness

Youth identify with the social conditions of the first hip hop movement; these social conditions are historically constructed as being conditions of racial, political and economic marginalization. Rose's discussion of "ghetto-blackness" and the symbolic significance of "the ghetto" are important factors to consider in the historical construction of cultural authenticity in hip hop. Hip hop authenticity in this sense is usually constructed by creating ties of identification with the "original" African American hip hop. Rose writes about the controversy over the commercially successful white rapper Vanilla Ice and how he used stories of "close ties to poor black neighborhoods" (Rose 1994:12), in order to authenticate his identity as a rap artist. Although most would agree that the controversy around Vanilla Ice was over his lack of rapping and rhyming skillz, Vanilla Ice's case as a white rapper trying to identify with poor black communities "hightlights the significance of "ghetto blackness" as a model of "authenticity" and hipness in rap music" (Rose 1994: 12). Furthermore, "Vanilla Ice's desire to be a "white negro"…to "be black" in order to validate his status as a rapper hints strongly at the degree to which ghetto-blackness is a critical code in rap music" (Rose 1994: 12).

Identifying with "ghetto-blackness" is a specifically localized experience, identifying with the archetype ghetto black male by using local experiences is how hip hop artists around the world authenticate and validate their identity within hip hop culture. Writing about the symbolic significance of the ghetto in African American rap music, Rose points to the importance of the local and the way in which a white audience may not receive the message while bopping their heads to lyrics written by a black person from the 'ghetto':

> "Even though rappers are aware of the diversity of their audiences and the context for reception, their use of the ghetto and its symbolic significances is primarily directed at other black hip hop fans…rap's ghetto imagery is too often intensely specific and locally significant, making its preferred viewer someone who can read ghettocentricity and with ghetto sensitivity" (Rose 1994:12).

One could read Rose's above words as stating that African American rap is a black form of cultural expression best understood by a black audience of similar experiences. Though this may be the case, I believe the theme of 'ghetto-blackness' has an underlying theme of expressing and identifying the local.

"Identity in hip hop is deeply rooted in the specific local experience, and one's attachment to and status in a local group or alternative family"(Rose 1994:12), hip hop allows for youth to talk about what they know best, and what they know best is hanging out with their local 'crew' or 'posse' in their own 'hood'. Identity comes out in hip hop articulated as words, as music about the local social environment.

1.2 Culture as a Social Construct of Intellectuals

Before delving any deeper into the question of cultural authenticity, the concept of culture needs to be re-evaluated as a theoretical and categorical concept used by intellectuals. The concept of culture needs to be questioned. Why has culture become a subject of great concern and debate among academics and intellectuals? Is culture something we live? Is culture something everybody possesses? Are some cultures better than others, who decides this? Is culture something taught to human beings in diverse ways? How is culture defined? Is it tradition? Is culture invented? Does culture exist anywhere? And who gets to decide what 'culture' means and who possess it? What's the difference between 'culture' and 'way of living'? Does culture really need to be concretely defined in one way and who should define it? What makes hip hop a culture?

I am not sure if we can ever answer all these questions, or if we ever really want to answer these questions. Maybe the problem is not with finding the answers but with questioning how it is that these questions need to be asked. Where does the term 'culture' come from?

Bauman and Kelley discuss the way culture has been conceptualized by Western intellectuals and academics. Bauman and Kelley write about how this conceptualization of culture has been led by intellectual searches for authentic forms of culture, and often results in essentialist ideas of race and cultural differences. Although these types of anthropological and sociological attempts at discovering and documenting diverse forms of understanding humankind, this search is actually driven by a politics of knowledge construction. The pursuit of finding human behaviors and documenting them as culturally authentic, in essence creates a power dynamic in which the culture and people of study become the 'other' and the status of the intellectual is legitimized. The study of human behaviors defined as 'culture' is an admirable pursuit that contributes to our understandings of humankind and to our understandings of our own selves. But when culture is an object of study that essentializes a cultural form, and legitimizes the ranking of cultural differences, the practice creates stereotypes of the people being studied. Such studies can become a powerful form of covert discrimination and racism because these studies become legitimized forms of knowledge.

Bauman documents the epistemological and discursive history of the relationship between the Western intellectual and the concept of culture. He writes:

> "The notorious diversity of definitions of culture given the currency in sociological, anthropological and non-academic literature- even of discursive contexts in which the concept of culture is situated and given meaning- should not conceal the common basis from which all such definitions and approaches derive.

> However the phenomenon of culture defined, the possibility of the definition, of the very articulation of culture as a phenomenon of the world, is rooted in a particular vision of the world that articulates the potential, elaborates the values and legitimizes the role of the intellectuals" (Bauman 1992: 2)

This "particular vision of culture" allows for human beings to be viewed as groups in terms of unique ways of living, in terms of their culture. "The ideology of culture", as Bauman says, "represents the world as consisting of human beings who are what they are taught" and " makes possible the articulation of a plurality of 'ways to be human'" (Bauman 1992:3). The story goes, that the Western world finally opened their eyes to life "previously unnoticed and considered uninteresting" (Bauman 1992:3) and a diversity of cultures became acknowledged. But the problem with this anthropological, sociological story of discovery and awakening is that it "misses the point crucial for the birth of cultural ideology: the perception of diversity as culturally induced, of differences *as* cultural differences, of variety *as* man-made and brought about by the teaching /learning process. It was a particular articulation of diversity, and not newly aroused sensitivity to differences, that was the constitutive act of the ideology of culture" (Bauman 1992: 3).

This ideology of culture acknowledges cultural differences as different ways of being taught and socialized into being human and these differences as cultural differences are the object of fascination for intellectuals. Culture is conceptualized within this fascination of cultural difference(s), culture is not taken for granted as a merely a way of living but is taken as something that needs to be documented, controlled and defined.

The basis of Bauman's argument is in discussing the shift of Western intellectuals from legislators of knowledge to interpreters of knowledge. Bauman documents the way

present day intellectuals are now interpreters of culture, and not so much administrators of knowledge on culture and defining culture. The following is Bauman's optimistic belief in this new system of knowledge:

> "A case can be made that the total disappearance of the issues of politics and domination from the visions implied by the 'interpretive' strategy has more than an accidental connection with the currently experienced dislocations in the social function of intellectuals, and particularly in their relations to the effective powers that be; from the perspective of present day intellectuals, culture does not appear as something to be 'made' or 'remade' as an object for practice; it is indeed a reality in its own right and beyond control, an object for study, something to be mastered only cognitively, as a meaning, and not practically, as a task" (Bauman 1992:23)

Despite Bauman's belief that present day intellectuals now view culture as a 'reality in its own right and beyond control', it still remains that culture is an 'object of study' and considered 'as a meaning'. Culture is still an object of study for intellectuals, and although they may now recognize that it is a reality beyond control, they are still seeking to find the meanings within culture. The study of culture has come a long way, but often times intellectuals still get caught up in treating culture as merely an object of study, whose meaning they must decipher and document. Kelley explores the way intellectuals have and continue to begin their research with preconceived notions of what black culture is and they continue to misinterpret and over interpret meanings in African American culture(s).

In the essay "Lookin' for the "Real" Nigga: Social Scientist Construct of the Ghetto" (Kelley 1997), Kelley documents the way in which social scientists have studied African American communities and cultural expression, creating discourses that perpetuate stereotypes. Studies done on African American communities are often problematic because social scientists began their research with preconceived notions of

who the 'authentic Negro' is, that he is a part of the 'black underclass' living in the ghetto, doing ghetto things (Kelley 1997: 20-21). As Kelley states, "… "real Negroes" were the young jobless men hanging out on the corner passing the bottle, the brothers with the nastiest verbal representations, the pimps and the hustlers, and the single mothers who raised streetwise kids who began cursing before they could walk" (Kelley 1997:20).

Ethnographers in search of "authentic Negro culture" (Kelley 1997:20), were searching for an authentic culture, supposedly a culture that existed within ghetto communities among unemployed men, young single mothers and criminal youth, a culture shaped by trying to survive the ghetto and racism; this culture supposedly emerged out of this social bubble and is explained by themes of cultural survival. But as Kelley makes clear these social explanations were not simple equations in which (a + b + c) = y, in which (ghetto + poor + black) = survival of the fittest (male) in the urban jungle.

Overall, Kelly offers "some reflections on how the culture concept employed by social scientists has severely impoverished contemporary debates over the plight of urban African Americans and contributed to the construction of the ghetto as a reservoir of pathologies and bad cultural values" (Kelley 1997:17). In his discussion Kelley covers problematic topics of studies such as the 'culture of poverty arguments' which explain the black underclass as a cultural adaptation to racism and poverty (Kelley 1997:20), the social scientist's misguided search for 'soul' and the way 'soul' has been documented essentializing cultural expression to black male ghetto cultural expression (Kelley 1997: 24), the misunderstanding of the "Afro" hairstyle, and it's history from mainstream

downtown white chic to black "uptown rebellion" symbolic of the "militant virulent Black man" (Kelley 1997:31). Culture in such topics and studies of African Americans creates a discourse in which 'black culture' is reduced to 'coping mechanisms' (Kelley 1997:17), and the meanings of cultural practices are only considered in terms of what they mean to the intellectual and not the relevance they have to the cultural practitioner:

> "Much of this literature not only conflates with culture, but when social scientists explore "expressive' cultural forms or what has been called "popular culture" (such as language, music, and style), most reduce it to expressions of pathology, compensatory behavior, or creative "coping mechanisms" to deal with racism and poverty. While some aspects deal with and even resist the ghetto conditions, most of the literature ignores what these cultural forms mean for the practitioners. Few scholars acknowledge that what might also be at stake here are aesthetics, style and pleasure. Nor do they recognize black urban culture's hybridity and internal differences" (Kelley 1997: 17-18).

Of great importance in Kelley's argument is the case made for the hybridity and internal differences within 'black culture' or more accurately in African American communities. The point is that cultures do not exist in a vacuum, even when it is considered a marginalized culture; there are probably more difference within a culture than between cultures. Furthermore, the case can also be made that culture- as a way of life or human behaviors that exist within a specific community or however you define culture- in terms of being one specific set of behaviors does not really exist, but can only be found in the minds of knowledge producers and intellectuals. Cultures are inevitably hybrid with internal differences, spilling over into each other, and the differences between cultures is not always that apparent. In this case, the idea of a 'black culture' and the 'black underclass' are merely social constructs. Kelley questions the logic in trying to define one group called the "black underclass': "how do we fit criminals (many one time

offenders), welfare recipients, single mothers, absent fathers, alcohol and drug abusers, and gun-totting youth all into one class?" (Kelley 1997: 18).

Furthermore, the hybridity of black urban culture makes it almost impossible to try to define these hybrid forms under one all-encompassing heading of black culture. "Contemporary black urban culture is a hybrid that draws on Afro-diasporic tradition, popular culture, the vernacular of previous generations of Southern and Northern black folk, new and old technologies, and a whole lot of imagination" (Kelley 1997:42). Kelley's discussion on the hybridity and internal differences within black culture, and within African American communities is useful when considering cultural authenticity. The concept of culture itself is a contested concept. Therefore, cultural authenticity as a way of creating authority of what constitutes a culture becomes a very questionable pursuit; when cultural practitioners and intellectuals attempt to define cultural authenticity it is a very unstable pursuit, and is relative to who is defining it.

1.3 Global Localized Practices of Hip Hop Culture

The contested concept of culture and cultural authenticity are interesting when considering the way hip hop artists and enthusiasts around the globe define their movement as culturally authentic based on African American rap music and their use of localized forms of cultural expression. In the following, I will discuss different localized forms of hip hop culture around the globe and the way they define the cultural authenticity of their form of hip hop. As mentioned earlier "ghetto-blackness" is symbolically significant in the authenticity of rap music. If a rap artist can identify as being both from the 'ghetto' and being black, then their music is considered a culturally authentic form of hip hop. But if the rap artist does not identify with possessing "ghetto-

blackness", then the next best thing is to identify with is being "ghetto" and being "black" in another way. By being "ghetto" and being "black" in another way, I mean identifying as a poor-working class person, or being an ethnic minority that faces racism, or being politically marginalized; either way if one can identify as coming from a marginalized group one can identify with "ghetto-blackness" in terms of similarity[1]. But one could also argue that possessing or identifying similarities with "ghetto-blackness" may not be what practitioners of hip hop culture consider themselves to be doing, they may not be just trying to identify similarities, but they may be genuinely telling their story of where they come from and the struggles they face there; they are not trying to be similar but they are similar with respect to their geo-political situation.

As stated at the beginning of the paper, and as Rose has made clear, identity and location are the primary themes in hip hop culture. One could go further to say that identity comes out of local experiences, and from local experiences emerges hip hop culture. As Bennet believes "the cultural role of rap and hip hop cannot be assessed without reference to the local settings in which they are appropriated and reworked as modes of collective expression" (Bennet 1999a: 78). One could go further and create a theory of globalization and culture out of the cultural understanding of hip hop authenticity; hip hop culture emerges out of mainstream African American rap music, but it circulates around the globe and is re-appropriated under the local conditions; based on the local social, economic, and political environment, racial and ethnic composition and, preexisting forms of cultural expression.

In the following examples of hip hop subcultures, I will discuss how ethnographers examine the way hip hop is re-appropriated to express identity and

location. Identity and location are expressed through the use of local languages or dialects, expressing struggles of racism or political marginalization, and expressing problems surrounding national identity. The first example of hip hop culture I will examine is the subculture in Frankfurt among Turkish and Moroccan youth who use the German language in their lyrics.

In his inquiry on hip hop in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, Bennet questions how Turkish and Moroccan immigrant youth "have appropriated African American hip hop culture" and how they move "beyond a point of straight forward imitation", reworking hip hop to address issues "relating to racism and the problem of national identity" (Bennet 1999a: 77). Bennet's research question presupposes that African American hip hop has been re-appropriated into a cultural expression under local Frankfurt cultural conditions.

According to Bennet, one major way in which the Frankfurt youth have appropriated African American hip hop has been through their use of German lyrics. The Frankfurt youth first began rapping in English but they found that rapping in German more accurately expressed themselves: "an early attempt to develop hip hop beyond its African American context and rework it as a medium for the expression of local themes and issues came as a number of local rap groups began incorporating German lyrics into their music" (Bennet 1999a: 81).

Though it could be argued that the switch from rapping in English to German resulted in "a new measure of accuracy…between localized social experience and linguistic representation", as Bennet notes, "German rap has been by no means universally accepted by hip hop enthusiasts in Frankfurt" (Bennet 1999a: 82). Bennet

does not really expand on this point, but German lyrics could connote German nationalist patriotism (a problem for ethnic minority youth) or take away from the hip hop cultural authenticity considered to exist in African American English vernacular. Either way, rapping in German reaffirms a local culturally authentic form of hip hop to the local hip hop artists and to intellectuals like Bennet.

Bennet also points out that "much has been written about the cultural significance of popular music lyrics" and "less attention has been focused upon the cultural significance of the language in which they are sung" (Bennet 1999a: 82). The importance of the language used in lyrics is an important indicator of locality. As Bennet states, "the fact of language" can play "a crucial role in informing the way in which song lyrics are heard and the forms of significance which are read into them" (Bennet 1999a: 82). The use of the German language in rap lyrics is important in reaching the German-speaking audience. The linguistic nuances that exist in German lyrics speak more directly to a German-speaking audience; these cultural and linguistic meanings could not be conveyed as clearly in English.

Among the rappers and hip hop enthusiasts that Bennet interviewed in Frankfurt, it was "commonly agreed that only when local rappers began to write and perform texts in the German language did their songs began to work as an effective form of communication with the audiences" (Bennet 1999a: 82). One rap artist of the group United Energy in Frankfurt shares the enthusiasm in the importance of using German lyrics, he states, "people began to realize that it was too limiting rapping in English, because their knowledge of the language wasn't good enough. So now a lot of rappers have begun to rap in German and its just better, more effective" (Bennet 1999a: 82). The

use of German lyrics was a more effective way of the emcees[2] to express themselves and a more effective way of relaying their message to the audience. Using German lyrics reaffirmed local identities and was a more accurate way of expressing local cultural circumstances.

Another example of the use of local language is among Newcastle rappers who use the local Geordie English accent to convey messages more clearly and identify more closely with their audience. The lyrics "Aa dee it coz aa can' ('I do it because I can')" by Newcastle poet and rapper Ferank are "performed in a local Geordie accent" as a commentary on "aspects of Newcastle life and the local Geordie culture" (Bennet 1999b: 16). Ferank writes a commentary that is meant to demonstrate that "the stereotypical image of the Geordie character is erroneous" (Bennet 1999b: 16). Ferank wrote 'Aa dee it coz aa can' to criticize " the cultural conservatism which Ferank identifies with sections of Newcastle's population especially when they are confronted with someone who fails to conform with accepted conventions of appearance such as dress and hairstyle" (Bennet 1999b: 17). The use of Geordie in rap lyrics reinforces a sense of identification with the marginalization of Newcastle youth, whether over their identification with black music or with their working class position, and with the realities of Geordie culture. 'Aa dee it coz aa can' is a message that is best understood culturally and linguistically by local Newcastle youth. According to Bennet's analysis, the use of Geordie in this context reaffirms local cultural solidarity and gives this hip hop scene cultural authenticity because it represents local issues of marginalization.

According to Bennet local Frankfurt youth use hip hop culture to convey messages of their marginality, but he does not make it clear whether they are

marginalized because of their working-class status or because they identify with a black subculture in a predominantly white city. In the following Bennet discusses the marginalization Ferank faces:

> "While Ferank describes his work as a form of protest against the conservatism which he encounters on the streets of Newcastle, there is a clear sense in which, at a deeper level, he is also exposing the contradictions inherent in the sensibilities of the local white youth culture which collectively appropriates black cultural resources while simultaneously stigmatizing individual experimentations with black style as in some way going 'too far'" (Bennet 1999b: 18).

Could the use of 'black cultural resources' and 'black style' of dress be used by these white youth to identify with marginality, because being working class and white are not enough to justify as 'ghetto'? Although Bennet points out these hip hop artist's experience deflected racism[3] for their affiliation with black culture, I do not think that Bennet addresses the hip hop culture of Newcastle thoroughly enough. He notes the similarities of "the structural inequalities experienced by white British working class youth and African American" (Bennet 1999b: 8) and the need for attention to the authenticity of "white appropriations of hip hop" (Bennet 1999b: 7), but he does not sufficiently explain these similarities of socio-economic situations. Is Bennet attempting to claim some form of 'ghetto-blackness' in order to declare cultural authenticity of this 'white appropriation of hip hop'? Is it not enough that Newcastle youth describe local cultural experiences and use their Geordie accents in their lyrics enough to declare it culturally authentic hip hop? Is not the expression of local culture enough to define the local scene as culturally authentic hip hop?

The hip hop scene among South African youth in the Cape Town is another example of using the expression of local culture experiences and identification with 'ghetto-blackness". Central themes to the Cape Town hip hop scene is the articulation of

racial terms by post-apartheid youth, using political consciousness in their identification with the terms "coloured"[4], "black", "black consciousness" or not identifying with race at all. The local post-apartheid politics of race in Cape Town and local hip hop artists understanding of the original hip hop movement in the U.S are of interest when considering the culturally authenticity of their rap music.

Watkins describes the local Cape Town hip hop artists as constructing "narratives that relate the experience of their status in society; these narratives are structures in performance, among conditions that are the consequences of marginalization" (Watkins 2001: 32). According to Watkins, hip hop "emerged exclusively on the Cape Flats in the early 1980s ostensibly as a response to the oppressive and racist regime of the apartheid government" (Watkins 2001:30). As "coloured" citizens were displaced from the suburbs in the 1960's to accommodate white citizens, they were moved to Cape Flats (Watkins 2001:30). Cape Flats has "become home to the growing population of working class coloured people", it is also described as a "home to gangsters and a host of social ills"(Watkins 2001:30). Watkins has described hip hop as emerging out of a segregated working class neighborhood, a ghetto full of social problems and home to ethnic minorities.

Of particular interest to me is the way in which rap artists in Cape Flats have consciously constructed racial identities as political statements of the marginalization they have experienced. Members of the rap group Grave Diggers' Productions (GDP) "regard themselves as coloured rather than black" and identify with the Latino artists of the first emergence of hip hop in the U.S. Raoul of GDP defines hip hop as not a black thing, he states:

> "The misconception is that rap is black…wrong…rap music is a black and Latino thing. People don't emphasize the Latino part which means brown skin. We associate ourselves with brown skin…It's not an American thing…It got labeled as a black thing. The Latinos don't get their due: over half the original hip hoppers were Latinos" (Watkins 2001: 32)

Watkins describes identities under apartheid as "monolithic" and post-apartheid identities as "contested, ambivalent and re-invented" (Watkins 2001:32). Raoul expresses a well articulated concept of race in the context of hip hop and post-apartheid South Africa. The racial category of "coloured" is a very complex concept. Under apartheid "for whites and coloured people, black people (are) constituted as the 'other'" (Watkins 2001:32); black people were considered a political volcano ready to erupt at any moment. Black people were the most segregated group under apartheid. In the post-apartheid era since 1999[5], affirmative action programs were created for 'black' citizens. Other racial minority groups, such as 'coloured' people, began to feel increasingly alienated because they were not recognized as minorities the same way as 'black' citizens. Therefore, it is interesting the way GDP identify as "coloured" and that they identify with the Latino aspect in the history of hip hop[6], identifying with Latino hip hop is a way of identifying with the 'other' ethnic minority. Coloured people are marginalized ethnic minorities but the government does not legitimately recognize them as such.

After considering the way "coloured" hip hop artists have articulated race, it is interesting the way some hip hop artists in Cape Town politically construct their racial identities as 'black'. Those who identify as black, identify with the ideology of black consciousness, which was a political ideology "used to mobilize during the struggle against apartheid"(Watkins 2001:36). Deon a rap artist in Cape Town describes his ideology of black consciousness as a humanist perspective: "My interpretation of black

consciousness is, basically, being humanist, because the way I view black consciousness is being conscious of yourself, your community, who you are, where you come from" (Watkins 2001:37). Deon's understanding of freely expressing his racial identity as black is understood by him as a way of expressing his humanity; expressing who you are and where you are from is a human characteristic in this sense.

In Watkins explanation, hip hop artist's who identify as black are making a strong political statement. According to Watkins, hip hop artists who identify as black are re-affirming their blackness, something that could not have been done under apartheid, they are expressing their marginality without shame of what it means to be 'black':

> "By identifying with black people, these crews stress their allegiance to a racial group that experienced displacement and exploitation more severely than any other group in South Africa. Mobilizing around the ideals of black consciousness is, then, a strategy of resistance against the residual effects of colonialism, apartheid, capitalism and western imperialism"(Watkins 2001:37)

According to Watkins rap music is authentic when "it allows hip hoppers to emphasize differing perceptions of the world around them" (Watkins 2001:31). Watkins presents hip hop in Cape Town as a political tool used to express racial and class marginalization. Watkins analysis presents hip hop very well as a form of political resistance, he writes about hip hop as if it is a voice for the people. But besides the articulations of racial identities and political statements about race, what does hip hop mean to the practitioner? Does rap music consciously begin as a way in which youth can express marginal spaces within society or do rap artists just start out 'rockin' tha mike and then their marginalized identities come out in the music? How does hip hop become a political statement, is it just because marginalized youth are finally making their voices heard and that is a political statement in itself? How influential is the capitalist music

market in making the ghetto kid "ghetto"? To further explore these questions, I will return to Bennet's discussion of Turkish/Moroccan hip hop in Frankfurt.

Bennet writes about the way Turkish and Moroccan youth articulate their racial identity within Germany and within the context of hip hop culture. Turkish and Moroccan youth in Frankfurt experience racism because of their ethnic minority status and non-German ethnicity. In the context of race relations in Germany, Morroccan and Turkish people may never be considered real German citizens, but because they are not ethnically German they will remain being considered immigrants or visiting workers to the nation. In the Frankfurt hip hop scene two reoccurring themes "in German rap texts are expressions of the fear and anger instilled by racism and the insecurity experienced by many young members of ethnic minority groups over issues of nationality" (Bennet 1999a: 85).

In 1999, 25 percent of the city of Frankfurt were of 'foreign origin' and many of these people who lived in the city are Gasterbeiter (Bennet 1999a: 83). Gasterbeiter is a German word used to describe a guest worker; the term is "applied to those individuals, typically from Turkey and Morocco, who have been granted special permission to enter Germany in order to meet the country's demand for unskilled manual labour" (Bennet 1999a: 89). Gasterbeiter are treated as "second rate citizens" and face discrimination because German is their second language and they tend to occupy "minor positions in the labour market" (Bennet 1999a: 83). Furthermore, second generation immigrants are still considered Gasterbeiter despite the fact that they speak German fluently, are skilled workers or hold university degrees (Bennet 1999a: 83). These problems of discrimination are "compounded by the issue of citizenship, which, in contrast to many other countries,

is not given automatically to any child born in Germany" (Bennet 1999a: 83). Therefore, the possession of citizenship is always a suspicion held against non-German people living in Germany, regardless if they hold citizenship or not.

Bennet describes the successful rap song 'Fremd im eigenen Land' (A Foreigner in My Own Land), written by three rappers of respective origins in Haiti, Ghana and Italy. This song conveys the problems Gasterbeiters face in Germany, despite the possession of citizenship or long-term residency in Germany. Bennet writes about the local hip hop movement in Frankfurt as a way racially marginalized youth cope with racism. The way Bennet represents Turkish and Morroccan hip hop artist's in Frankfurt sounds very similar to the way social scientist has written about African American. According to Kelley's framework, Bennet would be very similar to those ethnographers who were in search of the 'authentic Negro'. Bennet defines the cultural authenticity of Turkish and South African hip hop in Frankfurt based on the fact of the youth's racial marginal status; identifying with the marginality symbolically expressed in the 'ghetto-blackness' of African American hip hop. Bennet defines cultural authenticity in this sense by the "ghetto- ethnic-minoritieness" of immigrant youth.

1.4 Defining Culture and Rap Music

In his analysis Kelley considers what black cultural expression and rap music mean to the culture's practitioners. Hip hop artists may articulate rap music as a form of expressing identity and location, but the practice of the art form may have more meaning than what intellectuals define it as:

> "Without a concept of, or even an interest in, aesthetic, style, and visceral pleasures of cultural forms, it should not be surprising that most social scientists explained black urban culture in terms of coping mechanisms, rituals, or oppositional responses to racism. And trapped by an essentialist interpretation of

> culture they continue to look for that elusive "authentic" ghetto sensibility, the true, honest, unbridled, pure cultural practices that capture the raw, ruffneck "reality" of urban life. Today, that reality is rap." (Kelley 1997: 35).

The way Bennet and Watkins present the hip hop scenes among working-class youth in Newcastle, among Turkish and North African youth in Germany, and among black and 'coloured' youth in Cape Town is presented in exactly the way Kelley criticizes intellectuals of representing black urban culture. Hip hop culture in these case studies is represented as a 'coping mechanism' for dealing with racism, poverty and political marginalization. Although music and the arts have always been used as a form of political resistance and as a way in which marginalized groups make their voices heard, I am not yet convinced that hip hop is merely a 'coping mechanism' for marginalized people and that is the only reason they practice rap music.

However, I still believe that identity and location are primary thematic concerns of hip hop. But what else would artist's express than who they are and where they are from (identity and location)? Were Bennet and Watkins looking for 'that elusive "authentic" ghetto sensibility, the true, honest, unbridled, pure cultural practices that capture the raw, ruffneck "reality" of urban life'? And because it just so happens that marginalized youth are practitioners of hip hop, intellectuals are drawn to documenting and deciphering the meanings in cultural authenticity.

Intellectuals want to go into ghettos all over the world and tell the story for these ghetto residents. As Kelley points out "…most rap music is not about a nihilistic street life but about rocking the mike, and the vast majority of rap artists (like most inner city youth) were not entrenched in the tangled web of crime and violence" (Kelley 1997: 37). As exemplified by the lyrics by Roots and Tribe Called Quests (at the beginning of the

paper), hip hop lyrics can also be about hip hop. The following lyrics by Common exemplify the way hip hop is considered a culture in itself, and more of a philosophy of living.

> I start thinking, how many souls hip-hop has affected
> How many dead folks this art resurrected
> How many nations this culture connected
> Who am I to judge one's perspective?
> Though some of that shit y'all pop true it, I ain't relating
> If I don't like it, I don't like it, that don't mean that I'm hating" (*The 6th Sense*, Common)

In Common's lyrics he contemplates on the way hip hop has affected so many lives, and also his rhymes express the philosophy of hip hop as colorblind. The philosophy of hip hop Common represents is a colorblind philosophy that is based on bringing together people of diverse backgrounds. This is only one example where one of hip hop's many philosophies is expressed. Therefore, instead of ohhing and awing at the way some 'ghetto kid' is creatively expressing his marginalization, maybe intellectuals should actually try to listen to how rap artists feel about hip hop, how hip hop has changed there life, how hip hop is 'the love of their life'. I don't mean to get all sentimental about how hip hop is some life changing thing, but rapping, dancing, creating graffiti art are also activities which youth engage in and intellectuals ignore the pleasurable, artistic experience of hip hop.

1.5 Translations of Hip Hop

Hip hop may be more than expressing a localized identity, but it may be a way of constructing an identity within a global/local context. The same way that Gilroy writes about the imagined transnational community that emerges out of African diaspora (Gilroy 1993), and the same way scholars write about a pan-indigenous movement bringing

together indigenous people based on similar histories of colonialism, hip hop can be considered a transnational urban movement based on similar experiences of political, economic and racial marginalization.

Instead of just considering hip hop to be a way the 'ghetto kid' describes himself, could we not consider hip hop the way an artist translates mainstream popular culture and combines it with local cultural expression, in the process creating a hybrid cultural form. I want to explore here how Walter Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator" provides a way to rethink hip hop culture, not just as a coping mechanism for racism or marginality but as a popular art form. The task of the translator is a metaphor for the translation of mainstream hip hop to localized forms of hip hop; African American commercial mainstream rap music is translated into localized forms of hip hop around the world. The mode of translation of the literary form presented by Benjamin, is a metaphor for the cultural translation of African American hip hop into culturally authentic forms of hip hop around the globe. Describing hip hop as translation of a cultural form is more than just describing it as expressing marginality and "ghetto-blackness", hip hop as translation gives consideration to not only the intellectual but to the cultural practitioner.

Benjamin's description of the task of the translator is applicable to the global localized translation of hip hop. Furthermore, his description of translation is interesting to consider in terms of intellectuals who study culture. In the task of the translator, Benjamin is trying to re-politicize a form of cultural production (i.e. translating literature) that the culture-vultures of his day have de-politicized. Benjamin is talking about literature; here I am talking about hip hop. I am adapting Benjamin's strategy here to re-politicize scholarship on hip hop. Particularly with cultural studies scholarship on hip

hop, I am asking whether an academic who understands herself to be only an interpreter (as Bauman would suggest) is sufficient? Or should not cultural studies scholars also need to find ways to connect their research to cultural production as well?

First, according to Benjamin a translator can only translate the 'poetic' if he himself is also a poet (Benjamin 1969:70). Could an academic ever really translate the true meaning in rap lyrics if she herself is not a poet, or if she herself is not a practitioner of the culture? Can researchers of culture ever really translate the social, linguistic or symbolic meanings of that culture if she herself is not a practitioner of that culture. Therefore, intellectuals do not always offer the best translations of cultural forms nor are they any better at defining cultural authenticity.

Secondly, languages change over time, the meaning of words change over time; words have no fixed meaning, even the "mother tongue of the translator is transformed" (Benjamin 1969: 73). Therefore, intellectuals should be aware of the fact that cultures change over time and cultures exist as hybrid forms that spill into one another. Although they have acknowledged this for a long time, they seem to forget this fact when researching cultural forms that take place within marginalized or ethnic minority communities; somehow they assume the words 'minority' or 'marginalized' means that these people have an authentic culture which is cut off from mainstream cultural forms. Therefore, when considering hip hop, the fact should remain that it has changed over time and what defined it's cultural authenticity is merely the fact of the practitioners marginality. All localized forms of culture are constantly changing, all cultural forms are authentic and hybrid.

When considering the translation hip hop artists conduct from mainstream African American hip hop to localized forms of hip hop, it is interesting to consider Benjamin's idea of translation as a mode and his idea of translatability. According to Benjamin:

> "Translation is a mode. To comprehend it as a mode one must go back to the original, for that contains the law governing the translation: its translatability. The question of whether a work is translatable has a dual meaning. Either: Will an adequate translator ever be found among the totality of its readers? …. If translation is a mode, translatability must be an essential feature of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential that they be translated; it means rather that a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in it translatability" (Benjamin 1969:70&71).

The translation of hip hop is a mode in itself; hip hop is the mode of constructing identities within an art form. As well, the translatability of hip hop depends on how the original mainstream form of hip hop is conceived and who the translator is. In this sense, the translation of hip hop depends on the translator, on the rap artist. Furthermore, "…a translation issues from the original not so much from its life as from its afterlife" (Benjamin 1969:71). So when considering hip hop's cultural authenticity from the 'original African American hip hop' to its translated form around the world, the new translated form of hip hop is as legitimate as the original form.

One other major point Benjamin makes is that the task of the translator is to turn his native language into the foreign language. As Pannwitz states "…the basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue…He must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language" (Pannwitz in Benjamin 1969:81). When hip hop is translated to different geographic, social, political spaces it becomes influenced by both the original form of American based hip hop to a

localized form of hip hop, for example in Cape Town. In this instance this particular subculture is influenced by both the original form (foreign language) into the Cape Town cultural forms of expression (native language), hip hop culture is a hybrid of the local and the global. Therefore, hip hop like many other cultures is in essence of creation an existence a hybrid form.

When hip hop is considered a form of cultural translation in a global and local context, then the fact of cultural authenticity and cultural hybridity make more sense. Cultures influence one another in their translation into different forms, and in this sense it is difficult to track any origin or truly authentic form, and cultures are always considered in their hybrid forms. All culture is by definition hybrid, hip hop culture is not merely hybrid but hybrid because it's translatability recovers the collective and political dimension of culture.

1.6 Endnotes

[1] Of course I do not use the terms ghetto, black or ghetto-blackness in this context as if they essentially mean a black underclass, but I use the terms as symbolic signifiers, which imply marginalization.

[1] Emcee meaning M.C, which rap artists refer to themselves as.

[1] "Jones has noted in his Birmingham-based research how young whites' 'displays of affiliation to black culture' resulted on occasion in them becoming 'the objects of a deflected form of racism' (Bennet 1999b: 12).

[1] According to Watkins, 'coloured' was an apartheid term applied to those South African citizens who were of Black African or East Indian descent. Throughout Watkins discussion on race, 'coloured' appears to be a terms that Black African and East Indian individuals continue to identify with, even after apartheid. Coloured has become a re-appropriated term that people identify with as a politically reaffirmed post-apartheid identity.

[1] Under Mandela's policy "all those who were not white" were considered black, In 1999 President Mbeki was inaugurated and under Mbeki those who are 'black' are considered black, and affirmative action programs apply to black citizens (Watkins 2001:34).

[1] Throughout academic literature the emergence of American hip hop is written as a black historical occurrence. Even Tricia Rose, whom every hip hop scholar quotes, throughout her book "Black Noise" (1994) she acknowledges the Caribbean, Puerto Rican and Latin American influence on hip hop but writes the history of hip hop as black history.

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Chapter 2: The Cultural and Geographic Location of E-town Hip Hop

> "Taro: This is what I see Canada, you know I see Canada represented as a guy, (he) is (a) white dude, Canadian hip hop, a white dude singing 50 Cent's latest hook, you know what I mean, it's humorous. It's almost like…Canada is a white country really. It's like descendents of the queen of England and they all landed here and they set up this establishment and "oh bring them over, bring the immigrants over". And you got immigrants coming here, right. That's what this country is, no one can tell me different. Okay." (Interview with Shogun 2003: 20)

When you think of a Canadian, what image do you see in your mind? Is he a white dude, that's a descendant of the queen, singing 50 Cents latest hook? When Taro, a Japanese-Canadian hip hop musician, thinks of a Canadian, that generic white dude pops up his head. Even while sitting in his studio in Edmonton, with myself a First Nations person and his friend Musa a Black Canadian, ironically Taro still thinks of Canada as a white country. I'm confused, is Canada a white country or not?

Well according to statistics Canada, the nation's citizens are very diverse in their ethnic origins. Canada is a very ethnically diverse nation, and the visible minority population and Aboriginal population have been steadily growing. In 2001, 13.4% of the Canadian population identified themselves as visible minorities[1]. Within Edmonton visible minorities accounted for 15% of the 927,000 residents, an increase from 14% in 1996 and 13% in 1991. In 2001, Edmonton had the fifth highest proportion of visible minorities among census metropolitan areas, behind Vancouver, Toronto, Abbotsford and Calgary. At this time, one in five persons in Edmonton were visible minorities. Within the census metropolitan of Edmonton Chinese (41,300), South Asians (29,100), Filipinos (14,200), and Blacks (14,100) were the largest groups of visible minorities.

Not to mention the growing Aboriginal population in Canada. In 2001 over 1.3 million reported having Aboriginal ancestry, this represented 4.4% of Canada's total

population. This was an increase from 1996 when 3.8% of people with Aboriginal ancestry represented the population. Furthermore, about one-half (49%) of Aboriginal people lived in urban areas in 2001. 4.4% of the Edmonton metropolitan area reported Aboriginal identity in 2001, an increase from 3.8% in 1996. This means that in 2001, there were 40,930 people reporting Aboriginal identity in the Edmonton metropolitan area.

So if Canada has a lot of visible minorities and Aboriginal people, why does Taro, who lives in Edmonton, think of Canada as a white country? The answer to this question is better understood when the Canadian policy of multiculturalism and Canadian racialization are taken into account. In the following section I will discuss how Canadian multiculturalism creates a discourse that racializes non-white citizens and constructs middle class whiteness as the national norm. After discussing the racialization of ethnic minorities in Canada, I will discuss the history of collaborations across racial and cultural lines done in hip hop music. I will briefly describe the complex process of race relations and racializations in hip hop culture. Next I will discuss the diverse racial composition of the Edmonton hip hop community, and the unique geographic and cultural location of hip hop artists from Edmonton. By discussing Canadian racialization, history of race relations in hip hop, the cultural and geographic location of the Edmonton hip hop community I hope to illustrate the context of my research and the urgency of the contribution of my research questions.

2.1 Canadian Racialization, Ethnic Others and Multiculturalism

In terms of cultural diversity and tolerance, contemporary Canada is defined by its federal policy of multiculturalism. According to Li, "there is no agreement on the

precise meaning of multiculturalism", but to Canadians it connotes ideas of "a public policy, an ideology, and cultural diversity" (Li 1999:148). The introduction of multiculturalism into the popular Canadian mind has spurred many debates about the perceived notions and perceived realities of racial politics in Canada. In theory, both the policy of Multiculturalism and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, promote a sense of tolerance and recognition of ethnic diversity in Canadian society. Under multiculturalism Canada is constructed as a nation in which many cultures can co-exist, a place where *even* racial and ethnic minorities are *allowed* to participate by practicing their own cultures.

But as Ujimoto points out," Canadian citizenship was never emphasized in the concept of multiculturalism" (Ujimoto 1999: 280). Multiculturalism was used to refer to the Canadian "social reality of cultural diversity", a "government policy designed to create national unity in ethnic diversity" and "to refer to the ideology of cultural pluralism (the Canadian mosaic) underlying the federal policy" (Kallen in Ujimoto 1999: 280,281). In this national landscape there is cultural diversity and the government recognizes it, but under this official ideology of cultural pluralism, who is the official Canadian citizen?

Peter asks the question: "Why is there always the assumption that ethnic groups are somehow outside the mainstream of Canadian society; that they need to make selected contributions, etc?" (Peter in Ujimoto 1999: 282). In essence, the policy of multiculturalism makes this assumption. Why are 'ethnic minorities' constructed as the 'other' and Anglo-white citizens constructed as the generic citizen? Does either of these citizens exist? And are they necessarily cultural opposites?

This "ethnic other" is created in the Canadian landscape opposite to the historical Anglo-white Canadian citizen. The Canadian nation-state is mythically thought of as naturally consisting of one race of sameness (Walcott 1999:27). A Canadian is thought of as a white person, who speaks English (or French) and has been born and raised in Canada. The Canadian history of immigrants from diverse parts of the world and the history of the Native peoples is often ignored, when the archetype Canadian is constructed:

> "The histories, memories and experiences of dispersed people always act as a transgression of nation-state principle. If we look at the history of Canada, with its ethnic mix of English, French, Ukrainians, Italians, Jews, Germans, Poles, Portuguese, and other Europeans, as well as Japanese, Caribbean, Chinese, South Asian, continental African, black Canadian and Native peoples, what we get is a complex picture of who and what the Canadian might be. All these groups (except for Natives) migrated at different points in time, and have found themselves placed differently in the narratives of the nation, in ways which complicate the fiction that the modern nation-state is constituted from a "natural" sameness.... each successive migrant group represented a rupture in the myth of the nation as a constituted sameness." (Walcott 1999:27)

Walcott makes the argument, that the myth of a nation built on 'constituted sameness' ignores the history of Canadian ethnic diversity and the contributions of many Canadian citizens. Canada's true history of ethnic diversity and racism is cleverly covered up with the policy of multiculturalism[2].

Bannerji makes another argument about Canadian multiculturalism, expanding to explain the intersections of racism, sexism and class inequality. Bannerji argues that Canada is a "sexist-racist entity", which defends itself through the policy of multiculturalism while erasing any claims that the Canadian state commits any form of discrimination (Bannerji 2000: 73). According to Bannerji, in practice "multiculturalism has never been effective", instead it serves "as an ideological slogan within a liberal

democratic framework", while supplying "an administrative device for managing social contradictions and conflicts" (Bannerji 2000: 73). These purposes that multiculturalism serves are important in perpetuating the myth that Canada is a "homogenous, solid, and settled entity" (Bannerji 2000: 73). Furthermore, although Canadian citizenship is imagined to be basically culturally homogenous and white, it is the "ethnic others" ignored in Canadian history that give the nation the ability to boast about multiculturalism and diversity:

> "Ironically, immigrant "others", who serve as categories of exclusion in Canada's nation-making ideology, become an instrument for creating a sphere of transcendence. The state claims to rise above all partisan interests and functions as an arbitrator between different cultural groups. This is the moral high ground, the political instrument with which the state maintains the hegemony of an Anglo-Canada. We might say that it is these oppressed "others" who gave Canada the gift of multiculturalism"(Bannerji 2000: 74).

It is in this gift exchange that Canada receives multiculturalism and the 'ethnic others' are branded by "racialization" (Bannerji 2000: 78), an exchange that does not appear to be very reciprocal for those racialized. Bannerji points to many of the instances in which Canada is a "racist- sexist" society. For example, the way Native people live segregated on reserves governed "economically, politically, and socially" different from the rest of Canada (Bannerji 2000:76) or how the nation has organized immigration policy based on imported labour "along lines of "race" and gender" (Bannerji 2000:76). Another example of Canada's blatant racist, sexist actions is the structural creation of "feminized" and "raced" poverty (Bannerji 2000: 70,71). Women who are poor "and impoverished women of color in particular" are constructed by the state "as political/social subjects who are essentially dependent and weak" (Bannerji 2000: 70). In terms of raced poverty, Bannerji states that an "odour of dishonesty" haunts the poor, but

especially those poor people who are not white (Bannerji 2000:71). Just like the impoverished women of color, communities of poor people of color are viewed as burdens of the state:

> "Whole communities are under suspicion and surveillance- Somalis, Tamils, Jamaicans, and so on. This raced poverty is both masculine and feminine, and even its feminine face does not fall within any code of chivalry or compassion and charity" (Bannerji 2000:71)

If you were to ask certain Canadians if racism exists in Canada, they may reply 'no' because it is a multicultural nation, where everyone is respected and allowed to practice their own culture. But not all would agree to this, especially Native people who live on reserves under Third World conditions, or average Arabic citizens placed under suspicion of terrorism since 9-11, or Afro-Caribbean or South Asian citizens criminalized in major metropolitan areas like Vancouver or Toronto, or any other group racialized as 'ethnic groups' in Canadian society. Many would agree to the fact that the Canadian state and its policy of multiculturalism, divides and racializes different groups within the nation:

> "Due to its selective modes of ethnicization, multiculturalism is itself a vehicle for racialization. It establishes anglo-Canadian culture as the ethnic core culture while "tolerating" and hierarchically arranging others around it as "multiculture". The ethics and aesthetics of "whiteness", with its colonial imperialist/racist ranking criteria, define and construct the "multi" culture of Canada's others" (Bannerji 2000:78).

The Canadian state is a system of oppression which creates the racialization of 'ethnic others' through the policy of multiculturalism, dismissing the fact of systemic racism towards ethnic minorities and sexist-racism towards women of color.

In fact even the discourse of diversity that Canadian Multiculturalism stands on is faulty. Bannerji describes diversity as a paradox, because diversity assumes a meaning of difference and tolerance, yet diversity is a term stripped of any true political power in which to protest Canadian racism or sexism:

> "This is its paradox- that the concept of diversity simultaneously allows for an emptying out of actual social relations and suggests a concreteness of cultural description, and through this process obscures any understanding of difference as a construction of power. Thus there is a construction of a collective cultural essence and conflation of this, or what we are culturally supposed to be, and what we are ascribed with, in the context of social organization. We cannot then make a distinction between racist stereotypes and ordinary historical/cultural differences of everyday life and practices of people from different parts of the world" (Bannerji 2000: 36-37)

So although statistics Canada can claim that our visible minority and Aboriginal population are steadily growing, increasing the diversity of the nation, this does not mean that racism is steadily decreasing. Merely acknowledging the diversity of different genders, races, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and classes of Canadian society does not stop racism or sexism. Claiming diversity in the Canadian nation-state does not change the racist-sexist policies of importing labour based on race and gender or the colonial racist existence of the Indian Act that still governs First Nations people.

Despite the policy of multiculturalism and long history of cultural 'diversity' in Canada visible minorities and Aboriginal people are racialized as the 'other' and racism still exists. It is within this climate of national multicultural policy and knowledge of everyday racializations that hip hop culture persists in the city of Edmonton.

2.2 Hip Hop Culture: A History of Collaborations

In order to research the local hip hop culture of Edmonton, it is necessary to understand how hip hop has been understood as a global urban subculture. To begin I will

cover the basic characteristics and emergence of hip hop. In 1994 Tricia Rose wrote "Black Noise" a pivotal book on the scholarship of hip hop, she wrote about the debates surrounding hip hop in the early 1990's, the emergence of hip hop culture in New York city and it's cultural meanings in contemporary Black America.

Rose wrote about hip hop as a culture with historical roots, within specific locations, and with specific cultural meanings. Rose recounts the history of hip hop as coming out of the South Bronx in post-industrial New York among displaced Black and Hispanic youth in the late 1970's and 1980's (Rose 1994: 27-28). "Hip hop emerged as a source for youth of alternative identity formation and social status in a community whose older local support institutions had been all but demolished along with large sectors of its build environment" (Rose 1994: 34).

The city of New York relocated whole Black and Hispanic communities from Manhattan to the South Bronx, these residents were uprooted during a time of housing shortages, unemployment, deindustrialization and "were left with few city resources, fragmented leadership and limited political power" (Rose 1994: 33). Whole communities were destroyed in the relocation process (Rose 1994: 30). It was under these circumstances 'back in tha day' that break dancing, rapping, DJing and graffiti art came to light as a culture called hip hop.

According to Rose, hip hop as a culture aesthetically, stylistically and theoretically is defined by the three concepts of *flow, layering and rupture in line* (Rose 1994: 38). The visual, physical, musical and lyrical lines in hip hop "are set in motion, broken abruptly with sharp angular breaks, yet they sustain motion and energy through fluidity and flow." (Rose 1994: 38) Theoretically interpreted flow, layering and rupture in

line define the qualities of the hip hop as a culture of resistance; these "effects at the level of style and aesthetics suggest ways in which profound social dislocation and rupture can be managed and perhaps contested in the cultural arena" (Rose 1994: 39). Of particular interest for my research is rap music. Rap is "a style of vocal delivery in which rhyming lyrics are spoken, or 'rapped', over a continuous backbeat or 'breakbeat' provided by a DJ who uses a twin-turntable record deck to 'mix' sections of existing vinyl records together to produce a new musical piece" (Bennet 1999a: 2). Rap music demonstrates these concepts of flow, layering and rupture.

Hip hop subcultures around the globe are described in terms of the way in which youth have re-articulated hip hop into a localized form. From its inception in the South Bronx among marginalized Latino and Black youth, hip hop has been described as a social space that allows youth who live in marginality to express their identities. From my observations the rap artists in the hip hop community of Edmonton are very ethnically diverse, how is it that youth have come to identify with this globalized subculture known as hip hop? Hip hop is often described as a subculture for the marginalized and in Canada certain groups are racialized as 'ethnic others', in this context how have youth in Edmonton come to understand race, identity and culture? I would like to frame this question keeping in mind how hip hop is considered a culture in itself and being carefully aware of the way studies of culture have been carried out among 'marginalized' populations.

> "Several scholars insist that Hip Hop is the pure, unaltered voice of a ghetto that has grown increasingly isolated from "mainstream" society. Missing from this formulation is rap music's incredible hybridity. From the onset rap music embraced a variety of styles and cultural forms, from reggae and salsa to heavy metal and jazz…And despite that many of the pioneering rappers, break dancers, were African American, West Indian, Puerto Rican, and strongly identified with

> the African diaspora, rap artists wrecked all the boundaries between "black" and "white" music" (Kelley 1997: 39).

As any real hip hop fan or artist is fully aware many of the pioneering hip hop artists were from diverse backgrounds, and as the literature on globalized hip hop subcultures points out hip hop is emerging in diverse places all over the world. Hip Hop began as a Puerto Rican, African American, Caribbean, New York thing, among youth from diverse backgrounds living under many of the same conditions in the urban environment.

Although many argue for the African American cultural authenticity of hip hop, Rivera has documented the culturally diverse origins of hip hop in the South Bronx, particularly those "aspects of hip hop musical history" that have been "so neglected" (Rivera 2003: x). In fact, "Hip hop has been a central realm of cultural production among Puerto Ricans of second and third- and beyond- generations" and has been "a cultural zone of intense interaction and cooperation between young Puerto Ricans and other New Yorkers, particularly African Americans" (Rivera 2003: x). Since its inception in the South Bronx hip hop has consistently been a cultural space where youth of diverse backgrounds contribute, yet those who are not African American have been historically neglected.

Even South Bronx raised emcee and b-boy Q-Unique, a member of rap group the Arsonists and the world famous breaking Rock Steady Crew, is written off as merely one of "The Latinos in hip hop" and his foundational creative cultural contributions are swept under the rug (Rivera 2003: 4). Q-Unique has been committed "to nourishing a historically grounded hip hop creativity" and "deeply resents being segregated, as a Puerto Rican, from a hip hop cultural core that often is assumed to be African American"

(Rivera 2003:4). According to Rivera, like many artists, the problem Q-Unique experiences in twofold.

> "First, hip hop is ahistorically taken to be an exclusively African American expressive culture. Puerto Ricans thus are excluded from the hip hop core on the basis of being Latino. Second, as Latino population numbers and visibility increase in the United States, a variety of national-origins groups with different experiences of colonization, annexation and/or immigration as well as varied histories of socioeconomic incorporation and racialization are lumped under the Latino pan-ethnic banner with little or no acknowledgement of their differences. This wider social phenomenon manifests itself within the hip hop realm when Latinos are grouped together on the hip hop margins under the presumed commonalties shared by Latino hip hop artists and enthusiasts"
> (Rivera 2003: 4)

The exclusion of Latinos from the historical hip hop core and the lumping together of the Latino pan-ethnic banner, is an example of the process of a complex racialization of hip hop artists. Just like there are many histories of racial politics in Canada, there are many histories of racial politics within hip hop.

Often times hip hop by cultural practitioners are creative collaborations done across lines of race and ethnicity (Rivera 2003: 2). When considering hip hop as a culture, in terms of racial politics there is a long history of collaborations done between artists of different cultural or ethnic backgrounds. These "collabo's" done between people of different "races" or "ethnic groups" are generally taken for granted as part of the scene (Rivera 2002; Rose 1994).

2.3 Rap Music in Canada? Even in E-town?

Within the Edmonton Metropolitan area there are several up and coming hip hop artists and groups. I doubt the artists I discuss would want to be described in terms of their race or ethnic background, many of the artists would most likely want to be written about in terms of their art. But I discuss the racial composition of the Edmonton hip hop

artists to demonstrate the diversity and the fact that collaborative work done across lines of race within hip hop is a norm in the culture[3].

One group that has received national recognition is War Party, a rap group composed of the following artists Smallboy, Girlie Emcee, Kool Ayd, and Tom Crier. Coming out of Hobbema, a reservation outside the city, War Party is an Aboriginal rap group known for their politically charged lyrics, talking about what it is like living on the rez and telling the story of Canada's colonial history with Aboriginal communities (Gragg 2002: 9).

Another group that has been around the E-town scene for quite some time is Dangerous Goods Collective (DGC). DGC is a three member group with a DJ Dice spinning on the turntable, featuring Touch and Stray as emcees rhyming to their own lyrics. Members of DGC have worked together for years and the group is actually a very ethnically diverse crew, DJ Dice is of Chilean descent, Stray is an emcee of Metis descent and a Touch is of an emcee of Afro-Caribbean descent.

Politic Live is another local hip hop group that has increased my enthusiasm and interest in the local hip hop community. Politic Live is a group "composed of brothers Bigga Nolte, Dirt Gritie, and their cousin Arlo "Young Mav" Maverick" (Rozenhart 2003: 17). Politic Live is a group that raps because of their love of music and "desire to rap about meaningful issues" (Rozenhart 2003: 17), and they are known for their promotion of the Edmonton hip hop scene and market.

Arlo "Young Mav" Maverick is also the host of the "Urban Hang Suite" show on the University radio station 88.5 CJSR, a show that promotes the Edmonton hip hop community and local artists, often giving air play to local rap artists. The "Urban Hang

Suite" is a rich resource for information on hip hop happenings, local events and artists in the Edmonton area. Another rich source I have found is the Politic Live website[4]. This website provides information on Politic Live themselves, but also the site on 'Community', provides excellent links, a guest book and active discussion forums. The guest book and discussion forums on the Politic Live website demonstrates a wide hip hop fan base and local Edmonton interest in hip hop artists and events.

As Krims has documented Edmonton has an active hip hop subculture. In his case study discussion of Cree rap, Krims describes the Edmonton hip hop community in the following way:

> "Edmonton has never attracted national attention to its hip hop scene, although all the traditional elements- rap music, Djing, breakdancing, and graffiti- have been present for quite some time. Geographically disadvantaged by its relative isolation in the prairie and more generally separated from the paths of the production end of the music industry, Edmonton nevertheless has developed rap music and Djing scenes of reliably high quality and with substantial local support. As is often the case, much of the audience for the music is truly subcultural …"
> (Krims 2000: 180)

Important to observe in Krims above description is that Edmonton hip hop occurs within the geographical and national context of Canadian hip hop. The Canadian hip hop scene and more generally the Canadian music industry "feels and responds to the dominating commercial and cultural presence of the United States" (Krims 2000: 177). Furthermore, "media coverage in Canada has historically focused exclusively on Toronto hip hop culture, and most nationally known acts are based in Toronto"[5] (Krims 2000:178). According to Krims, hip hop culture outside of Toronto labours "under the burden not only of not being American, but also of not being Torontonian" (Krims 2000: 179).

But in recent years hip hop scenes across the Canada have been receiving national acknowledgment. Just to name a few, K-os brought the national spotlight to Winnipeg; Rascalz, Swollen Members and Mocha Only have brought national recognition to the Vancouver rap scene for quite some time; War Party brought national recognition to Alberta. As well, Urban radio stations have been popping up across the nation; successful examples of this form of hip hop promotion include Flow 93.5 in Toronto, the Vibe 98.5 in Calgary, and the Beat in Vancouver. Most recently there has been discussion of plans to bring an urban radio station to Edmonton, under the frequency of Vibe 91.7 (Austin-Joyner 2003). Furthermore, as I have observed cities like Halifax, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver have had vibrant nationally successful hip hop artists in the scene for quite some time.

The growing hip hop market and the increasing cultural diversity in Canada and particularly Edmonton, makes the Edmonton hip hop community an excellent source for understanding discourses of race, culture, and identity.

2.4 Thesis Question

I ask how local identities of race and culture negotiated between Canadian ethnic minority youth, within the global context of Canadian hip hop and within the context of hip hop's cultural history of expressing the voice of the marginalized? Underlying this question, are questions of how scholars have thought race, culture and identities are represented through hip hop vs. the way cultural practitioners of hip hop feel about race, culture and identity within the subculture. For example, are the members of Politic Live just merely three Black Canadians who picked up the mike to express their marginality in society? I find such questions of hip hop insulting because hip hop artists are more than

just minorities with coping mechanisms and such assessments suggest hip hop artists only identify with their racial identities. Is expression of self really that simple? What is to be said about popular culture, black diaspora and hip hop culture? How do Edmonton hip hop crews identify with the "ghetto" and "blackness" of African American hip hop? How does Dangerous Goods Collective identify with the hip hop's history of collaborations done across lines of race and culture? How do Edmonton youth articulate identities of race and culture within the context of racial politics in Canada and in the context of hip hop culture?

2.5 Endnotes

[1] "Visible minorities are defined by the Employment Equity Act as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour". (Canada's ethnocultural portrait: the changing mosaic. Statistic Canada 2003)

[1] Walcott and Bannerji hold radically different positions on racism and multiculturalism. Walcott makes the simplistic argument that the history of diversity transgresses the nation principle, in fact multiculturalism ceaselessly invokes this diversity and constructs a new principle through it (i.e. the image of the mosaic). Bannerji on the other hand, recognizes this, enabling us to see how multiculturalism works as a hegemony by articulating or negotiating the normalization of whiteness with the image of the mosaic with the net effect of creating the illusion of a classless society in which all differences are meritocratically legitimate ones.

[1] It has been my experience that hip hop crews just end up together because they grew up together or went to school together or enjoy musical collaborations with one another, despite racial differences or similarities these crews that write music together are usually just friends.

[1] www.politiclive.com

[1] Such nationally successful Toronto artists include Saukrates, Kardinal Offishall, Choclair, Thrust, Baby Blue Sound Crew, and Jully Black.

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Chapter 3: Qualitative Methods and the Social Position of the Researcher

My ethnographic study of the hip hop community in Edmonton is influenced by my experiences with hip hop artists and hip hop heads, my relationship with music, and social theory on Canadian racialization and Black popular culture. Although there are several theoretical and methodological factors that directed this study, I will not deny the fact that as the principal researcher in this study my own social position and interactions with hip hop artists greatly influenced the collection of data.

I used participant observation in the context of performances of local hip hop artists[1] in order to understand the social relations of the subculture. As well, I interviewed hip hop artists in individual interviews and in group interviews. I began with semi-structured interview settings to "serve comparative and representative purposes" (Fetterman 1989: 48). But because of the sensitivity of the subjects of race and culture, I also used informal interviewing in order to increase the level of comfort for the interviewees and in order to answer my "unasked questions" (Fetterman 1989:49). According to Fetterman. "structured interviews have an explicit agenda, informal interviews have an implicit but specific research agenda" (Fetterman 1989: 48). Semi-structured interviewing methods were useful for outlining question topics and informal interviewing methods were useful for answering my implicit questions of race, culture and identity.

According to Rose, intertextuality "refers to the way meanings of any one discursive image or text depend not only on the one text or image, but also on the meanings carried by other images and texts" (Rose 2001:136). In order to understand the underlying discourses of race, culture and identity in the Edmonton hip hop community, I

relied on websites by local hip hop artists, rap lyrics of the artists I interview, and performances by local rap artists. Local identities are said to emerge from hip hop and rap music, race relations and racial identities are documented as major subjects of discussion in rap lyrics and hip hop as an authentic cultural form is often questioned- these three discourses and the combination of these discourses are my major subjects of inquiry. Through the intertextual analysis of websites, music and performance I came to better understand the discourses of race, culture and identity within the Edmonton hip hop subculture. The websites, music and performances gave me an understanding of current issues and events in the hip hop community and an understanding of cultural meanings and representations in the local scene. From this intertexutal analysis of websites, music and performance I came to develop interview questions.

Ethnographic methods and intertextual analysis were the major methods I used to understand the Edmonton hip hop community. Hip hop is defined as a culture that expresses the identity, location and marginality of it's practitioners. Furthermore, racial politics in Canadian society are to a significant extent defined by the policy of multiculturalism and the way in which certain groups are racialized as 'ethnic others'. My research questions emerge from my experiences of racism as an Aboriginal woman in Canada, and from my participation in the Edmonton hip hop community. It is within this context of Canadian racial politics and hip hop culture that I have questioned the way race, identity and culture are understood among Edmonton hip hop artists.

In the following I will describe the specifics of the qualitative methods used in this study. First, I will discuss the interview data used in this study, describing the general demographics of interviewees. Secondly, I will talk about my entrance into the Edmonton

hip hop community. In describing the constant process of entrance, I will specifically discuss my relationships with my two key informants and their help in my entrance. Thirdly, I will write about the snowball sampling technique I used in finding interviewees, and how I came to recognize the size and diversity of the subculture. Fourthly, I will write about my method of transcribing interview data. I will discuss the process of interpretation in such a tedious task. Fifthly, I will describe the informed consent and anonymity of my interviewees. Specifically my decision to use the interviewees stage names in the final draft of the study. And finally, I will describe my social position as a researcher. Describing how my race, gender, education and age influence my insider and outsider positions in researching the Edmonton hip hop community.

3.1 Interview Data

The main data for this study were eight semi-structured interviews conducted by myself, four of the interviews were group interviews, in total I interviewed fifteen members of the Edmonton hip hop community. A majority of my interviewees were male, in fact I was only able to interview two females. Although I tried very hard to find females hip hop artists to interview, in the end I recognized the gender bias in the sample was due to the male-dominated nature of the subculture. There was even a time when I thought that being a woman myself I would have an easier time finding female hip hop artists, this was not so. Among the hip hop artists I was familiar with, my understanding of the composition of the Edmonton hip hop scene is that a majority are male.

Furthermore, the interviewees were between 18-30 years of age, most were in their mid-twenties. In conducting my research I noted a generational bias between 'old

cats' and 'young cats', there is no exact age measure between the two groups. Generally 'old cats' defined themselves as having the most cultural, musical and market experience in hip hop, and they defined 'young cats' as new members to the art form, usually in their teens or early twenties.

In order to find hip hop heads willing to be interviewed, I searched the internet for Edmonton artists that had their own websites, I went to several venues featuring E-town hip hop artists, I searched local newspapers for information featuring E-town hip hop artists, and I listened to local radio stations that played hip hop and Urban music. I can't say I spoke to every hip hop artist in Edmonton, or that I know of every hip hop artist in the city. When I questioned Smarts on his familiarity with the local scene and with local cats, he pointed out to me that "you can never say you know everything or every body, there's always another kid in the basement practicing, spitting rhymes in front of a mirror" (Interview with Smarts 2003: 2). I am sure there was some kid spitting rhymes in his basement who would have greatly contributed to this study, but due to method and time constraints I was unable to reach the entire Edmonton hip hop knowledge that is out there.

In the end, most of my interviewees were men who defined themselves as 'old cats' in the scene. Interviewees were generally those who were the most high profile artists in the local scene and in local media, and those who had been around the scene for a while, these people ended up being males who called themselves 'old cats'. Throughout the process of interviewing and finding interviewees, I wished I could have interviewed more females, more 'young cats' and more Caucasians. I feel that because of my position as an ethnic minority researcher I may have had limited access to Caucasian artists. I had

heard about these 'white rap artists' in Edmonton from Caucasian friends but I met only a few through the hip hop scene.

3.2 Entrance

Anthropologists and sociologists doing ethnographic studies often talk about their entrance into their community of study, this is often referred to as entrée. Entrée is not as simple as a person making an entrance by walking into a room through a door. Baca Zinn describes entrance as a constant process. "Like all researchers, I found that entrance was not a one-time activity…Entering was a constant process because potential informants had to be negotiated with and relationships established separately" (Baca Zinn 2001: 161). Entrée into a community is a constant human activity of maintaining relationships, respect and understanding.

There is no specific point in which I felt I had made my entrance into the local hip hop community. But I do remember the two people who greatly contributed to my understanding of the local hip hop scene, I would even say that they opened my eyes to the existence and vibrancy of the E-town scene. Those two individuals are Stray from Dangerous Goods Collective, and Arlo Maverick of Politic Live and the Urban Hang Suite Show from the university radio station CJSR.

My first acquaintance with Stray is discussed in the introduction of the thesis. When I met Stray I was discovering the diverse nature of Aboriginal intellectuals and artists in contemporary Canada. I was wondering where I fit in this contemporary climate, I always felt I was not Native enough for the Aboriginal intellectual community at the University, I was not traditional enough. Although I spoke Cree fluently, I grew up on a Northern Alberta reserve, I was raised on traditional cuisine and crafts, I was not

Native enough. My families Christian beliefs, my feminism, my interest in cultural studies, my love of hip hop music, my choice in combat sports and my choice of radical activist friends, made me an oddity that never quite fit. Apparently my lifestyle and beliefs were contradictory to what it meant to be an 'authentic Native intellectual'. That is where I was at when I met Stray. Stray is an old school cat from E-town, he is a member of Dangerous Goods Collective, he has a downtown studio with his crew where he makes hip hop music. If you really want to break him down demographically (like Statistics Canada might), Stray is of Cree and Scottish descent, racially he may be described as Metis, he is an urban Aboriginal who grew up in Edmonton.

So when I met Stray and found out about other urban Native youth who had identified with hip hop as a culture, I felt less odd and more like a bright piece of tile in a mosaic of colors. I always get excited when I meet other young Native people who break the stereotypes that government and media depict us as. It was also at this time that I became aware of the Nechi identity that urban Native youth have re-appropriated.

When I met Arlo I was actually arguing with media. It was a Saturday night, I was in a car with a bunch of girls and we were listening to CJSR. Arlo and others were on the radio station debating the premise of the reality show "Average Joe". "Average Joe" is a reality dating show in which several women are told that the man they are fighting for is wealthy, when in fact he is a man of an average income. The hosts of the CJSR show were making the argument that what women want from men in relationships is money, and the show "Average Show" was proof of this fact. I was deeply offended. I immediately called the radio station and exclaimed, "As a feminist, and as a women in school, I was deeply offended by your comments…" After my rant to the person on the

other end of the line I was transferred to Arlo, I told him my complaint and he apologized. About five minutes later, Arlo came on the air and personally apologized to us and any other women that might have been offended.

The rest of the week I felt very proud of my defense of women everywhere. I was also thinking about the "Urban Hang Suite" show on CJSR, I found Arlo to be very professional and cooperative. So on the next Saturday night I called CJSR and asked Arlo if you would be interested in contributing to my study. This was in June 2003 before the defense of my proposal in August 2003. Arlo expressed interest in my study, especially in the recognition and documentation of the hip hop community. We planned for our first meeting to be at "Tha Truth", an emcee battle that was part of a series. I only got to speak to Arlo for a few minutes, I appreciated his dedication and belief in the local scene. Our meeting was brief because Arlo was hosting the show that night and he was one of the organizers. I continued to speak to Arlo throughout the summer, he helped me find more resources and contacts for my research. In fact Arlo was my first interviewee, and after our interview he gave me more contacts who might be interested in being interviewed. The following is an except from my fieldnotes:

> "Arlo was very helpful, interviewing him and talking to him has definitely enriched the scope of my project. As a radio DJ for CSJR, as a promoter in the city, as an emcee and member of Politic Live, as a co-founder of Maverick entertainment; Arlo has a great deal of knowledge of the E-town scene and has contributed a great deal to the community. At the end of the interview Arlo gave me several other contacts that may be helpful in my research and who may be useful to interview." (September 30, 2003)

3.3 Snowball Sampling

In the research proposal for this study I proposed to keep the scope of the study focused by interviewing three Edmonton hip hop crews. I proposed that because rap

music is the most popular, commercially successful hip hop art form, and because rappers often confront questions of race, culture and identity in their lyrics and performance, interviewing rap artists was my most viable method for documenting these representations[2]. I proposed to interview the members of three hip hop crews. I was choosing these three hip hop crews to interview based on their years of experience in the Edmonton hip hop subculture and because of their high profiles as visible ethnic minority rap artists.

Once I began interviewing, and the ball began rolling, as most ethnographic studies go, my understanding of the community began to broaden and as I gained more experience my questioned became sharper. For example, my interest began among Aboriginal hip hop artists, but as I realized the way Edmonton artists did music collaborations across racial and ethnic lines, I realized my naivety in racially categorizing artists and I soon became interested in the 'Edmonton hip hop community'. I also became interested in the different geographical factions in the city and in the efforts being made to advance the hip hop/Urban market in Edmonton.

My first interview was with Arlo. Once my ethics review was accepted by the Sociology Department at the University of Alberta, I informed Arlo and because of his busy schedule, I interviewed him almost immediately. Immediately after our interview Arlo asked me what other interviews I had lined up, I admitted that I hadn't scheduled any yet, that I was still making contacts. That morning he gave me several other contacts, most artists were eager to be interviewed as soon as possible.

My sample began to snowball as I met more hip hop heads and artists. My interest in the hip hop scene began because of my own experiences with the Edmonton scene, my

initial questions involved Aboriginal involvement in the subculture, and as I came to understand the size and diversity of the subculture I can to understand it as an artistic community of organic intellectuals.

3.4 Transcribing, Interpretation and Meaning: "How dare it take so long!"

"How dare it take so long", Stray jokingly exclaimed as I explained to him how long it had taken me to transcribe all the interviews. Transcribing was a major task and interpretive process for analyzing the data for this study therefore I feel it is necessary to describe my understanding of the method of transcription.

As was stated in the informed consent form, each interview was to be tape-recorded and then transcribed. I choose the method of tape-recording and transcribing because after reading a mountain of literature on qualitative research in sociology and recent ethnographic studies, it seemed that this was the standard. I thought that transcribing the verbatim of the interviews, would increase the reliability of the study. I believed that transcribing was something good qualitative researchers did. I thought that transcription represented a qualitative researcher's integrity. My undergraduate education in cultural anthropology and graduate training in sociological qualitative methods, taught me that transcription was a sign of sound research and a mark of a thorough examination of interview data.

Despite being told that I did not have the time to transcribe all of my interviews and that it was not necessary for me to do so, I had hours of tape-recorded interviews and transcribing seemed to be the best way to thoroughly analyze and organize such data. And since my thesis was to be presented in written form, I recognized that sections of the

interviews would eventually be translated into written form in order to be incorporated into my thesis.

But it seems that I am not alone in naively believing that transcription increases the validity and reliability of qualitative research. In the following Kvale describes the general procedure and process of analyzing interview data:

> "Interviews are seldom today analyzed directly from tape recordings. The usual procedure for analyzing is to have the taped interviews transcribed into written text. Although this seems like an apparently simple and reasonable procedure, transcription involves methodical and theoretical procedure. For example, once the interview transcriptions are made, they tend to be regarded as *the solid* empirical data in the interview project. The transcripts are, however, not the rock-bottom data of interview research, they are artificial constructions from an oral to a written mode of communication. Every transcription from one context to another involves a series of judgments and decisions." (Kvale 1996:163)

Transcription is often written off as the task that results in 'the solid empirical data' of an interview project. While transcribing the audio into written text, I found myself making several methodical and theoretical decisions. For example, should I capitalize the terms 'Native', 'Black' and 'Urban music'? What would it mean to capitalize such terms? What do these terms mean to the interviewees?

According to Kvale although "there is no standard form or code for transcription of research interviews there are some standard choices to be made" (Kvale 1996: 170). For example, "Should the statements be transcribed verbatim and word by word, including the often frequent repetitions, or should the interview be transformed into a formal, written style?" (Kvale 1996: 170). As I transcribed I developed my own writing style for the transcriptions. I transcribed basic verbatim, omitting the "um hum", "ahh", "like", and "ya know", utterances made by the interviewees and myself. Throughout the transcripts I noted background noises and pauses in thought.

One guideline for transcription is to try to do justice to the interviewees and "imagine how they themselves would have wanted to formulate their statements in writing" (Kvale 1996: 170). Many of the artists I interviewed were very articulate in their speech. I do not want to give an overly romanticized representation of my interviewees. But through the interview dialogue several of the artist's lyricism and intellectualism and musicality seeped into their speech. I wanted to capture this flow of conversation into the transcripts. Therefore, to put it metaphorically, the transcribed word for word verbatim was a mix between a freestyle and studio version of the interviews.

As Kvale states, rather "than being a simple clerical task, transcription is itself an interpretive process" (Kvale 1996:160). Transcribing is far from being a simple clerical task, it is tedious difficult interpretive work, one has to be a great listener and writer in order to do justice to the interviewees words and thoughts. I spend days and hours listening to my interviews, translating the oral into written word. I listened closely and can honestly say that, although I was unintentionally trying to capture a 'solid empirical' body of data, the transcriptions for this study are a written interpretation of the dialogues exchanged in interview. Kvale describes the interpretive nature of interview transcriptions in the following:

> "Transcribing involves translating from oral language, with its own set of rules, to a written language with another set of rules. Transcripts are not copies or representations of some original reality, they are interpretive constructions of some reality, they are interpretive constructions that are useful tools for given purposes. Transcripts are decontextualized conversations, they are abstractions, as topographical maps are abstractions from the original landscape from which they are derived." (Kvale 1996:165).

In the midst of the interpretive process of transcribing the interviews for this study I kept in mind how the interviewees would like to be represented in writing, especially

because several of them were used the written word- being lyricists themselves and many being avid readers of media that represented rap artists.

In her book *New York Ricans From the Hip Hop Zone* Rivera interviewed several Puerto Rican hip hop artists who contributed to building and creating the urban culture (Rivera 2003). In the appendix of the book there are interviews and articles that Rivera published in Spanish and English American urban/hip hop magazines. Rivera displayed interviews she had done with Fat Joe, with La Bruja, with Angie Martinez and with the legendary Dynasty Rocker's Diana. The journalistic style and flow demonstrated in Rivera's interviews influenced my style of writing interview transcriptions for this study.

Transcribing the interviews for this study was an analytic and interpretive process. Transcription is a theoretical task that helps with the interpretive process of understanding the meanings of ideas and concepts discussed in interview dialogue. The written transcripts for this study are influenced by the artists flow of dialogue in the interview, the interpretive process of translating the oral into written form and the journalistic style of writing verbatim demonstrated by Rivera.

3.5 Informed Consent and Anonymity

Before I began an interview I asked the interviewee to sign an 'informed consent' form explaining the purposes of the study and informing them of their rights as an interviewee. According to Kvale, informed consent "entails informing the research subjects about the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the design, as well as of any possible risks and benefits from participation in the research project" (Kvale 1996:112).

In the informed consent form for this study[3], the interviewee was asked to sign for consent twice. First, the interviewee signed to agree to participate in the study about his/her experience and involvement in the Edmonton hip hop community and that the information given would be kept in the strictest confidence by the researchers. Secondly, the interviewee signed to agree that they understood that the study was a cultural study on the popular culture of hip hop and they agreed to the use of his/her stage name in the final results of the study. All interviewees agreed to the use of their stage names in the study.

A major aspect of informed consent is to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the interviewee's personal information. In research, confidentiality "implies that private data identifying the subjects will not be reported"(Kvale 1996:112). Kvale adds, "If a study involves publishing information potentially recognizable to others, the subjects need to agree to the release of identifiable information… this should be explicitly in a written agreement" (Kvale 1996: 112). Every interviewee in this study agreed in writing, to the use of his or her stage name in the final published results. Although the stage names of the artists will be used in this study, the real names of individuals interviewed will be kept confidential.

In this study I asked for the permission to use artist's stage names, this is not a new practice for qualitative research conducted on hip hop artists. Researchers conducting long-term or book length studies on hip hop artists such as Tricia Rose (Rose 1994), Raquel Rivera (Rivera 2003), and Tony Mitchell (Mitchell 2001) all used the stage names of artists in their research. I have yet to come across a qualitatively based academic article or book on hip hop culture or rap music that does not use the name of the artists featured in the literature.

Furthermore, all of the artists I interviewed for this study were happy to contribute to educating others of their art form and culture. Several of the interviewees were used to marketing and promoting their stage names and the names of their crews, in order to sell records or promote a show. Some artists were familiar with being interviewed by the media, and some artists were the media and familiar with interviewing others. Overall, the interviewees for this study were professionals accustomed to the process of recording and disseminating their thoughts.

In the process of conducting qualitative research, informed consent can be a reminder of the relationship between the researched and the researcher. In discussing their study on poor and lower class American urban dwellers in the 1990's Fine et al found this to be true. Fine et al expressed that the "informed consent form forced us to confront and contend with the explicitly differential relationships between the respondents and ourselves; it became a crude tool- a conscience to remind us of our accountability and position" (Fine et al 2000: 113). In the following Fine et al explain how the interviewees understood the power dynamics involved in this relationship and the process of creating knowledge through such a relationship:

> "…many of the women and men we interviewed both recognized and delightfully exploited the power inequalities in the interview process. They recognized that we could take their stories, their concerns, and their worries to audiences, policy makers, and the public in ways that they themselves could not, because they would not be listened to. They (and we) knew that we traded on class and race privilege to get a counternarrative out. And so they "consented". They were both informed and informing" (Fine et al 2000 :115).

The hip hop artists interviewed in this study understood the consent they were giving, because of their experiences with media and the music market they understood that they

were being informed on the consequences of being interviewed and they understood that they were informing a researcher about knowledge on a global subculture.

The individuals interviewed for this study were artists and entrepreneurs, some very aware about the way hip hop culture is viewed by different institutions and segments of Canadian society. For example, many of the hip hop artists interviewed for this study were very aware of the labels and stereotypes media placed on 'rap artists' of different racial backgrounds. They were also very knowledgeable when it came to the way the capitalism markets hip hop culture and the way Canadian society perpetuates certain racisms and sexism. Through their music and influences on Edmonton media, the artists interviewed in this study wrote lyrics, composed music, managed websites, performed on stage, and promoted local events. The interviewees for this study already had an audience where they voiced their opinions, being interviewed for this study was not the only way in which these artists and entrepreneurs expressed their stories, their concerns and their worries. Due to the nature of the livelihood of being a hip hop artist a majority of the individuals interviewed understood that they were 'both informed and informing' by participating in this study.

3.6 My Social Position as a Researcher

During fieldwork and throughout the interview process, colleagues and friends found it fascinating that I was an Aboriginal woman doing research on hip hop culture. Being a woman who is a member of a racial group that has historically experienced institutional racism in Canada, and since I was writing about a popular subculture that represented controversies on race, I felt added social pressure. The act of conducting such research made me feel like an ethnic spectacle, like the token Aboriginal intellectual.

But while I was interviewing artists on hip hop culture, I was hoping that my Aboriginal identity gave me more confidence in asking about race and culture, and being a woman I felt I had the right to ask about the representation of women in hip hop. This type of thinking may have been very ignorant on my part, but it can't be denied that my social position influenced the research process and my interactions with informants.

According to Kvale, the qualitative researcher is the instrument through which knowledge is gathered (Kvale 1996). By interviewing, Kvale believes that, "the importance of the researcher as a person is magnified because the interviewer him or herself is the main instrument for obtaining knowledge" (Kvale 1996: 117). Therefore, being an Aboriginal woman (particularly a Cree "Treaty Indian"), a graduate student in sociology and a part of the Edmonton hip hop fan base for a few years, who I am did influence how knowledge on the Edmonton hip hop community was obtained.

While discussing the history of religion and Aboriginal culture, Rex Smallboy and Girlie Emcee described their comfort in the interview in the fact that I was Native.

> "R: <skip> We didn't know we were getting a Native, and smudged this morning and I wasn't sure, we had an incident when we were touring.
> G: This lady. <laughter>
> R: <laugher> She was lighting smudge <referring to Girlie Emcee> and this lady did not like the way this smudge smelled and she was offended by it.
> G: And she thought I was doing something, like I was praising bazozo or something, Beelzebub "Ahh!" <a scary growl sound>. I know she was pretty intimidated and insulted by the fact that when she came into our cabin and cleaned, she could smell smudge: "what is that, I don't like that, you don't just burn smudge in my house!". She just pretty much couldn't handle the fact that…and I tell her it's just like holy water, you bless your house, same thing, the smudge it's enlightening, it fills the house, the scent is wonderful. <skip> I'm trying to explain to her but she's pretty offended.
> R: (43.2) So I was glad you could understand because buffalo grass, that smell kind of stays for a while, and I love the way it smells.
> A: Yeah it smells good." (Interview with War Party 2003:12)

I too felt very comfortable interviewing Aboriginal hip hop artists, the smell of sweet grass on the reserve was comforting, and I appreciated the importance of War Party's spirituality. I could understand why War Party was very passionate about writing lyrics that directly discussed contemporary reserve life, I believe their lyrics give our people a reason to have pride in our heritage and the lyrical content educates mainstream Canadian society. But just because I am Cree, I knew that I could not empathize everything, I'm not an emcee and I come from a totally different reserve and I have a different upbringing than the members of War Party. Identity has a multiplex nature, and "there will inevitably be certain facets of self that join us with the people we study, other facets that empathize our difference" (Narayan 1997: 34). So even in an interview situation where I would have felt most like an insider with my informants, I was still an outsider in many aspects.

During my fieldwork when I met a new interviewee or discussed hip hop with local artists, I always wondered where I fit in the local scene. Was I the boring outsider researcher? Was I the nosey insecure grad student? Was I just another familiar faces at local shows? Being a lover of hip hop in my mid-twenties, I was very comfortable in clubs and at local venues, it was easy to become an insider in this setting. But being a woman who is not a hip hop artist myself, I sometimes felt like a curious outsider during interviews. So even though my age and ethnicity made me appear as an insider at times, I was also an outsider when it came to being a non-musical woman.

Baca Zinn suggests that minority scholars are insider field researchers in minority communities, and they have "some empirical and some methodological advantages" (Baca Zinn 2001: 159). The most important advantage they have is "that the "lenses"

through which they see social reality may allow minority scholars to ask questions and gather information others could not… minority researchers will pose different questions and perhaps discover different answers… there are certain aspects of racial phenomena that are difficult if not impossible for a member of the dominant group to grasp empirically and formulate conceptually" (Baca Zinn 2001: 159). Several times I found myself interviewing informants and while discussing racial phenomenon in Canada and in hip hop media, there was a very relaxed atmosphere and much laughter. Often times this is when I learnt a lot, when we were laughing about our common experiences with racism and annoyance with ignorance.

While interviewing Dangerous Goods Collective, the topic of categorizing people kept on coming up. Discussing the way in which media categorizes music by people of color into one vague group was one of these contentions. The following is an excerpt on their understanding on the term Urban music:

> "Touch: It's a way to categorize a whole group of music. Instead of saying hip hop, instead of saying R&B, instead of saying Dance, instead of saying Techno, instead of saying Drum and Beat, instead of saying Reggae. What you are basically doing is grouping all the 'colored' music into one big category <laughing in sarcastic tone>.
> Stray: If you can stick an Ethnic face on it, it's Urban."
> (Interview with DGC 2003: 11)

When I interviewed DGC, there was a great deal of laughter, joking and sarcasm when discussing serious topics on racial phenomenon- I guess because I too found racial ignorance to be so common in my life, there was a common bond when it came to laughing about the everyday occurrence of peoples ignorance. I am not sure if this is the special empirical and methodological "lenses" Baca Zinn discusses, but without that comfortable atmosphere in this interview, I may not have turned my attention to the

discourse surrounding the term "Urban". In fact before this interview I never considered the importance of the term "Urban", and the way it generalizes music by people of color and how it limits the way we think of music.

After my interview with DGC, I began asking artists what they thought of the term "Urban" music. I was often afraid that my own experiences or preconceived notions of Canadian racism or hip hop culture would interfere with the way I collected data, but it was little discoveries like this that made me feel that I was on the right track. According to Narayan, "those of us who study societies with preexisting experience absorb analytic categories that rename and reframe what is already known…even the most experienced "native" anthropologist cannot know everything about his or her own society" (Narayan 1997: 32). Although I too was an ethnic minority from Canada and a lover of hip hop culture, there was still a great deal to be learnt from the Edmonton hip hop community.

In ethnographic research, "the extent to which anyone is an authentic insider is questionable" (Narayan 1997: 23). Being immersed in ethnographic research is more complex than simply thinking of yourself as an insider or outsider in your community of study. As an alternative to the dichotomy of insider/outsider, Narayan proposes that anthropologists be viewed "in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations" (Narayan 1997: 23).

Narayan is an anthropologist of German, American and Indian descent who did an ethnographic study of storytellers in rural India in the 1980's, through this research she discovered the limitations of the concepts "Native" and "insider" qualitative researchers (Narayan 1997). Narayan suggests that, the "loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and flux… education, gender, sexual

orientation, class, race or sheer duration of contacts may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status" (Narayan 1997: 23). As ethnographers we should give more attention to "the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts" (Narayan 1997:23). It is more rewarding "to examine the ways in which each one of us is situated in relation to the people we study" rather than dwelling on sorting out who is an authentic insider (Narayan 1997: 31).

I found that in different interview situations my own identity shifted to understand the ideas interviewees were conveying. For example, with War Party my political Aboriginal identity was ignited, with DGC my hybrid racial and cultural identity was fired up. A person "knows about a society from a particular location within it" (Narayan 1997: 32). With each different interviewee I found myself empathizing differently and understanding hip hop culture from a different viewpoint. The methodologies that were used in this research were influenced by the artistic subcultural community under study and my respect for the relations formed with informants.

3.7 Endnotes

[1] By hip hop performances I am referring specifically to freestyle battles and rap performances.
[2] Although breakdancers, graffiti artists and other hip hoppers who are a part of the subculture would be useful to conduct participant observation with or to interview, the depth of the study does not allow me to do so and interviewing rappers would provide insight into the way race, culture and identity are represented in the subculture.
[3] The informed consent form for this study is available for the reader in the appendix.

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Chapter 4: The Community: Collective Identity & the Racialization of Music

> Perhaps our most vexing theoretical dilemma swirled around the question, So, what constitutes a community? How do we write about real estate, land-bounded communities like Buffalo or Jersey City, geographically valid, zip-code-varied, "real" spaces in which we nevertheless found so little in the way of psychologically or socially shared biographies or visions?" (Fine et al 2000: 110)

What constitutes a community? That is the question Fine and Wise asked while researching poor working class city dwellers in Jersey City and Buffalo. According to Fine and Wise, "We recognized from our theoretical interests, confirmed by narratives we collected, that profound fractures, and variation, cut through lives within these communities" (Fine et al 2000: 110). For the Jersey City and Buffalo sample, even "simple demographic nuances by, race/ethnicity, gender, class, generation, and sexuality marked dramatic distinctions in experience" (Fine et al 2000: 110). With such a fractured portrait of experiences, even when similar demographics and geographies exist, where is the community? Does a community exist in a physical place or in similar experiences? And who decides what constitutes a community, community members, politicians or social scientists? While conducting my research on the hip hop scene in Edmonton, local media and interviewees consistently referred to "the hip hop community".

In the following I will describe events, businesses and establishments where hip hop culture is sold and promoted in the city of Edmonton. Next, I will go through the concept of "community" held by the Edmonton hip hop community. I will describe the term community using my interview with Arlo Maverick, a member of Politic Live and radio host of Urban Hang Suite on CJSR. Through my interview with Arlo I will explain the discourse of community used by hip hop artists in Edmonton. I will illustrate the discourse used by the Edmonton hip hop community by describing the structure of the

community and similar visions of the past, present and future held by local artists; how hip hop crews form, the sense of hip hop history, the need for positive images of youth in the Black community, the volunteers who maintain the community, and the vision of unity for the hip hop community. And finally, I will discuss recent developments towards the city of Edmonton having an Urban radio station and the highly racialized term "Urban music". To discuss Urban radio and Urban music I will use excerpts from interviews with several artists. Exploring recent discussions over an Edmonton Urban radio station and Urban music in Canada, gives more understanding to how hip hop artists in Edmonton situate themselves in the international pop music market and how hip hop artists understand the racialization of their art form in a capitalist market.

4.1 "Real" Places in the Community

There were certain places on certain times on certain days of the week that you could find the vibrancy of the Edmonton hip hop community. These "real" spaces in which the Edmonton hip hop community exists includes the following: CJSR 88.5 a community run University radio station, websites run by local hip hop artists and crews, shows featuring local artists and emcee battles, independent studios owned and operated by Edmonton hip hop artists, stores specializing in hip hop clothing and gear, hip hop and R& B nights held at night clubs. In the following I will briefly discuss some of these places.

CJSR 88.5 has historically been a major source of disseminating music among the hip hop underground in Edmonton. At the time I conducted my research, special shows that featured hip hop music were, the Platform with Mumps Saturday nights and Urban Hang Suite with Arlo Maverick later on Saturday nights. The Urban Hang suite was from

11:30pm- 3:00am, the show played new and old school hip hop, reggae, music featuring local artists, and interviews with local cats.

In Edmonton I came across a few independent studios owned by local artists. To name a few, such hip hop studios include the Dangerous Goods Collective studio, SmashtBenz studio, Shogun Entertainment, and Tuffhouse Records. These studios are usually owned and operated by older cats in the community, and they are almost always self-taught in producing and using recording equipment.

Websites hosted by local artists were also very important for maintaining the local culture[1]. These websites had several interactive features and served as a form of self-promotion for artists. Edmonton hip hop websites had discussion forums, guest books, news in international hip hop culture, postings of local events, and music from local artists available to listen to online. An online hip hop community exists through these websites, connecting Edmonton artists to each other and to the rest of the world.

One place where mainstream hip hop culture thrives is at special hip hop and R&B nights at local nightclubs. One major promoter that hosts several large events is Urban Metropolis Entertainment. Urban Metropolis began promoting events at the University of Alberta campus in 1994, and is "one of the longest running urban promotions collective and DJ CREWS in Western Canada" (Urban Metropolis 2004). Urban Metropolis claims their trademark has been the variety of people they attract to their parties, where people "from every race and walk of life" come together at their events (Urban Metropolis 2004). In fact, "Urban Metropolis have put on some of the biggest Hip Hop and R&B urban events in Western Canada history with over twelve sold out shows at Reds nightclub with upward to 3100 people in attendance" (Urban

Metropolis 2004). In 2003, these promoters brought such acts as Naughty By Nature, Ja Rule, Benzino and the Beatnuts to the city of Edmonton (Urban Metropolis 2004). According to Urban Metropolis, they "have come a long way from when the culture went from underground to mainstream" (Urban Metropolis 2004). I have attended several Urban Metropolis events over the years, there are usually long lines outside of their events and the crowd is usually young and ethnically diverse. Although they have been labeled as 'mainstream', they host some of the largest diverse hip hop parties on a consistent basis- giving hip hop consumers in Edmonton a regular place to congregate.

There are also the emcee battles and shows held by local crews. These include community events such as Ignition and Hip Hop For Hunger. Ignition was a show that featured local hip hop artists, the event was held in 2003 to raise money for the Youth Emergency Shelter and Services (YESS), a shelter for youth in need. 'Hip Hop For Hunger' is now an annual event, organized by local hip hop artists that raises money for the Edmonton Food Bank during the Christmas holiday season. These shows are organized by local hip hop artists, usually attended by other artists and are truly subcultural gatherings. The usual audience of Edmonton battles are "all-male crowds of "heads" (Austin-Joyner 2004: 31), and there are codes of behavior while in battle. Offensive racial comments are unacceptable, while clever word play and poetry are highly reinforced. In the following an emcee known as Karnage explains his opinion of battle behavior: "The only common logic people can come up with to outdo each other is to outbrag them or outboast them… A lot of people, including myself, are sick and tired of it and are trying to change it to bring forth more of an intellectual way of speaking: with poetry and rhythm" (Austin-Joyner 2004: 31). Battles and shows organized by local

artists are attended by hip hop heads, these of the places where artists can come together to promote themselves and appreciate each other's work

Within Edmonton there are stores specializing in Urban clothing and hip hop gear, sell clothing and often distributing records by local artists. When you walk into these establishments, there are usually posters and flyers on the wall promoting recent events featuring local artists and mainstream popular artists. Popular hip hop culture is a profitable market and these are businesses that promote and sell the culture; carrying brands such as Sean John, Phat Farm, and Zoo York. Such stores include Foosh, Colorblind, and the Soul Shack.

4.2 A Vision for the Community

In my interview with Arlo Maverick the word community was mentioned almost fifty times. Arlo had the most extensive use of the concept of community in terms of an Edmonton hip hop community and I will be drawing on his interview in order to understand this concept. Arlo referred to community in several instances: "the community", "the hip hop community", "the Black community", "the Caribbean community", etc. Although there was an awareness among all the interviewees that there was an Edmonton hip hop community, there was no one geographic location within Edmonton that the hip hop community resided, all the artists I interviewed shared different visions for the hip hop community, but there was a sense of history, and direction for this community. In the following excerpt Arlo, describes how hip hop crews come together in Edmonton:

> "Angele In your opinion, how do hip hop groups and crews get together in Edmonton?
>
> Arlo: What do you mean?

Angele: Do people just start making music together? <laughter> Or is it based on community? Or just friendships? People who live close by? Or is it that you hear about somebody else is doing a similar type of music and you try to collaborate with them?

Arlo: It's a mix of all of that! 'Cause if you look at it like, when we originally had Juvenile crew, it was...me I just like... all the members of Politic Live are all related. My cousins Bigga and Grit are two brothers and I'm their cousin. So we always had that unison as far as us being a family unit, but the cats who we hooked up with to form the Juveniles were friends of ours, who took a liking to the music and said "okay lets form a group, lets actually do this, lets do that". And it's like similar minds that actually just working together. Or sometimes you'll see, some cats actually just link up, from it just being, you hear this cat spit[2], and he spits so sick! That you're like "well a'ight, well yo we gotta make this person part of our camp, we gotta make this person a part of our team". Or like "yo you wanna do a track together?". One track works out, and all of a sudden you find that there's a chemistry between you and this other artist, and then you start working on more tracks and all of a sudden, it's like "okay well, let's try to do a group thing". So sometimes it how it works out, sometimes its just from knowing somebody. Cause if you look at a lot of the cats from 182 or even WON18[3], which are like older fractions of Edmonton's hip hop community, a lot of them were just guys who knew each other growing up for years and stuff. So that bond was just right there for them to actually form groups.

Angele: Okay, okay. I didn't write this down but its actually one of my biggest questions. How do you think race plays into how crews come together? Because I've heard and I've seen and I've read that ya know, that's how crews come together. Do you think that race is a major determinant or do you think it's just a side thing of how crews get together?
<Arlo interrupts the question and adds>

Arlo: I don't think it's a major determinant, but at the same time it does play, I wouldn't like... I'd be naïve to say it doesn't play a role or anything like that. 'Cause like if you look at it, like hip hop itself originated from within the Black community. Fortunately it's been able to spread so that it reached and touched everybody. You have Native American rappers, you have Spanish rappers- with Spanish people they've always been there from the beginning, so that's not even a consideration right there- you have white rappers, you have like Polish rappers, German rappers, like everywhere around the world, East Indian rappers in the South.

So I think that when you do have, the thing about it is that if you look at it, it's easier for, it was easier for Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, Easy-E and MC Ren and Yella, to form N.W.A because they were four, they were five Black people who were all coming from the same environment and knowing exactly what Black people go

through in South Central or Compton, California. You look at Public Enemy. Flava Flav, Chuck D, Professor Griff, all of those guys there knew what it was like being a Black man coming from Staten Island. Wu-tang, same thing. Not necessarily…it's not necessarily that you can't really pull some body else in, but it's like, when you're dealing with a lot of areas, especially in the States, where it's a whole Black community, you're not really gonna find a lot of white kids or any Spanish kids or…or Filipino kids or anything around then. You're gonna have your people because they represent where you're coming from. And if you look at Native American rappers, your gonna find that, you've got War Party, there's not a Black person in War Party because where they're from, you're not gonna find too many Black people. You look at, I don't know, there's just numerous crews. But now you're beginning to see that you'll have the combination of the one white guy or the one Black guy. Swollen Members. Mood Rough. Or just numerous cats that are coming out nowadays. Where it's like, now you're actually seeing kids, where these people are coming from mixed environments, where all of a sudden they put like ya know, like alright I'm gonna put this cat , I'm gonna look beyond the fact that he is Filipino or white. I'm gonna put him in the crew because this kid has skill. And a lot of the time that's what it came down too, that's what it always comes down too, however if you're in an environment where there is no white kids than you're not gonna have a white kid in your group. And that's something that… like I said, from the beginning race does play a part in it and I would be naïve not to say so but I think that it's not the overlying factor that a lot people tend to want to make it to be." (Interview with Arlo Maverick 2003: 3-4)

One of the first questions I asked hip hop artists was, how do hip hop crews come together? How is it that hip hop groups form? I asked this question to get at the root of many academic arguments that claim that marginalized youth are drawn to hip hop and come together based on racial, political or class lines (Rose 1994, Bennet 1999, Krims 2000, Cumberland 2001, Watkins 2001, Rivera 2003). Arlo's above statement describes the different ways many Edmonton hip hop artists come together to create music; they come together based on musical skill and chemistry between artists, they come from the same neighborhoods, or they are from the same ethnic communities or families.

Artists come together by appreciating each others musical skills. Like Arlo says, "you hear this cat spit, and he spits so sick!" and you think to yourself "well yo we gotta make this person part of our camp, we gotta make this person a part of our team". And if

two hip hop artists work together and they find that there is a chemistry between them, they are more likely to work together again. As Arlo mentioned, artists in Edmonton sometimes come together because they grew up together. Politic Live consists of Bigga and Grit who are brothers and Arlo who is their cousin. Arlo gives the examples of 182 and WON18, who are crews that came together because they were from the same neighborhoods.

One group that exemplifies artists coming together because they came from the same neighborhood and appreciated each others artistry was DGC. Touch and Stray were from the same neighborhood in the west end and Dice was a mentor they heard of growing up. Touch remembers, "me and Stray grew up in the same neighborhood. And in those times we used to watch Dice and people like him, or I did at least. And I don't know, they were our mentors basically because I first of all didn't believe, until I saw people like Dice and A-Okay and Point Blank that you could do hip hop and not be from New York. …Edmonton's not big so you're bound to hook up, especially when we're from the same hood. Just eventually things just ended up this way and got locked, basically just mutual goals, basically"(Interview with DGC 2003: 3). Stray recollects a similar story, "Like (Touch) was saying we grew up in the same neighborhood and Dice used to DJ for another guy A-Okay and he lived in my same complex. …And I knew (Touch) was rapping too, so I somehow, I don't remember exactly how it happened. We just ended up, he came over and we just started making beats, learning how to produce and stuff like that. And we came up with a few good ideas for tracks and we went to the studio and recorded them. And for a while we were just solo artists… The years went by

and we got more tracks down and I think it just kind of ended up falling into place as Dangerous Goods" (Interview with DGC 2003: 3).

In DCG's description there was no explanation of how a Chilean dude, a Black dude and a Metis dude came together, their narrative of how the group formed was based on being from the same neighborhood and hearing about each other's artistic abilities. In my interview with Arlo, I straight out asked him if he thought race was a major determinant in how hip hop crews are formed. Arlo did not think that race was a major determinant on how crews formed, but he did say it would be naïve to ignore that it is an influence. He believes that hip hop did begin in the Black community, but it has grown globally and spread to different cultures and races. Arlo gives three examples of hip hop groups that come from ethnic communities and rap about their experiences: N.W.A which is a group of Black males from South Central L.A, Public Enemy which is a group of Black males from Staten Island, and War Party which is a group of Aboriginal youth from the reservation Hobemma. These three groups are from geographic areas in which a majority of the population is Black or Aboriginal and therefore, "You're gonna have your people because they represent where you're coming from". If you are from a Black community, you are likely going to rap about issues about where you are from and you are likely to collaborate with other Black artists. Arlo also gives the examples of groups that are racially mixed, like Swollen Members, which consists of Black and white members, they come from "mixed environments", neighborhoods or cities with an ethnically diverse population. Arlo concludes that it comes down to skill, and race does play a part in how hip hop crews come together, but he thinks "that it's not the overlying factor that a lot people tend to want to make it to be".

Although it could be argued that personal or aesthetic chemistry doesn't rule out similarities of class, race, politics; from the point of view of the artists I interviewed there is a belief that within hip hop culture artistic integrity transcends class, racial, or political lines. The members of DGC came from the same neighborhood and are therefore likely from similar classes. The members of Politic Live are relatives and are therefore from a similar ethnic background. But the argument that Arlo, Touch and Stray make is that what drew them together is music. It seems that the belief that hip hop is a colorblind culture, causes members of the culture to look beyond both differences and similarities.

The next question I usually asked artists was what they thought were that influences in bringing hip hop to Edmonton. I expected that they would give answers involving American television or American music or the marketing of hip hop. But the answers they gave me were more pertinent to the growth of the Edmonton hip hop community, they discussed Edmonton or Canadian media sources. The following is from my interview with Arlo:

> "Angele: But in your opinion what do you think were the biggest influences in bringing hip hop to Edmonton?
>
> Arlo: The biggest influences?
>
> Angele: Like helping it grow?
>
> Arlo: Definitely Teddy Pemberton, who is better known as T.E.D.D.Y[4], rest in peace. Don Joyce[5] definitely. The Maximum Definitive[6] play a huge, huge role. Altered State Alliance[7] definitely, that crew is just a collective of emcees that have gone out to represent Edmonton, beyond just being in Edmonton. Like these cats have made videos, one of the cats is actually signed to a label out of New York or whatever, he's done shows in Germany and stuff. NEX is basically a mentor to a lot of the cats who are here in the city that you're seeing make a big impact. He is someone to look up to, who to me is a fundamental character. Minister Faust, like CJSR, just a whole row with CJSR, like even me coming into the game and being in it for the last five years or so. The cats who proceeded me like Poetic Akin, Minister Faust, A-Okay[8], these cats were dudes who definitely

left an impact, you always had your pinnacle little periods where things would pop off from…Task Force[9]…A-Okay and Deadliss being on the compilation in 1991[10], which lended some credibility to us as a community, just out of nowhere. And like I said Maximum Definitive, and even War Party, as much as a lot people say "Well okay they're from Hobemma and stuff", they've done so much in this city here that everyone just considers them to be an Edmonton based group. And even the Magoo Crew, like a lot of people have forgotten about them, but when they were actually here doing things, they were doing so much for the community and not only were they bringing forth the emceeing aspect, which has always been…I wouldn't say always been, but has become so much of the forefront, but they were representing the elements of being a b-boy, breaking and even graff work, as well too.

So, as far as pinnacle people or anything like that, to me I think that everybody plays an important role. And to basically say that one man's role is even lesser than another person, one person's role may have had more of an impact than the other person, but each person plays a role in everything regardless. From you doing this interview right now, that's playing a role. To DJ Instigate promoting for Universal Urban, that plays a role. Smashtbenz droppin' "Audio fellatio" and winning an award for it, that's playing a role in it. (Touch) and (Stray), Dangerous Goods being on the compilation for "Dig Ya Roots"[11], that's playing an important role. So for me I don't want to come in and say that one person plays more of an important role than anybody else or one situation…

Yeah, to tell you the truth there are situations that are more important, because if you look at it, you can't basically go through history well okay, well you look at the history of the United States and say, "well all of this is <snapping his fingers>". But if I were to give you like five main important times or whatever I would have to get back to you on that." (Interview with Arlo Maverick 2003: 4-5)

When I asked artists what they thought were the main influences in bringing hip hop to Edmonton, most would answer by stating who they thought influenced the growth of the hip hop community. In his above statement, Arlo mentions quite a few DJs from CJSR that played hip hop, R&B, and reggae on their radio shows. T.E.D.D.Y, Don Joyce, Minister Faust, Poetic Akin, and A-Okay, these are all DJs that hosted shows for a campus community radio station for the past two decades. A lot of times these radio shows were the only places listeners could go to listen to hip hop, R&B and reggae in

Edmonton. These community radio hosts tried keeping up to date with recent hip hop, R&B and reggae music, disseminating a culture over the airwaves.

Arlo also refers to a lot of hip hop pioneers in the Edmonton hip hop scene. Maximum Definitive was nominated for a Juno for Best Rap Recording in 1993, Altered State Alliance continued the west end school of lyricism, Task Force had the first hip hop video coming out of Edmonton in 1992, War Party were the first Aboriginal rappers to feature their video on Much Music in 2002, Magoo Crew schooled and carried on the b-boy tradition, and the list goes on. There were pioneers, there was a movement going on in the west end since the 80's, CJSR has historically been known for keeping the underground going by keeping updated with recent events and music. By noting the accomplishments of pioneer Edmonton hip hop community members what Arlo is actually doing is explaining the history of a community. The Edmonton hip hop community quietly began as late night shows on a small community radio station and became a scene in which Edmonton artists were making a name for themselves on a national scale.

Based on my literature research and the dominance of American media in Canada, I made the assumption that Edmonton hip hop artists would cite American media sources as the main influences in bringing hip hop culture to the city. Unintentionally I assumed that my interviewees would take a cultural imperialism stance (Shuker 2001:70), I thought they would plainly say that American media brought hip hop to Edmonton. "In terms of mass media and popular culture, evidence for the cultural imperialism thesis, as it became known, was provided by the predominantly one-way international media flow, from a few international dominant sources of media production, notably the USA,

to media systems in other national cultural contexts" (Shuker 2001: 70). To Edmonton hip hop artists, it was not the one-way flow of American mass media and popular culture outlets like MTV or BET that stuck out in their minds, it was the subcultural Edmonton based media sources that took American hip hop and redistributed it with an E-town twist. The Edmonton DJ's, emcees, breakdancers, discovered an American originated popular culture and rearticulated it back to the city of Edmonton. The history of this localized culturally rearticulated hip hop is what Edmonton hip hop artists believe to be the cause of the growth of the culture in their city.

The following is an excerpt from my interview with Arlo. When I asked him about the political messages Politic Live spread or if there were specific issues they believe should be discussed, Arlo began talking about the community again.

> "Angele: It's just a question in my research. How is Politic Live most political. And what issues do you want to put out there the most?
>
> Arlo: I think just the, the unification within the Black community. Cause right now, if you look at it, like last week was a devastating week in Edmonton[12] where there were events that were ridiculous. And to me what upsets me most about that is that we've lost lives but to me those lives were not lives that, the thing most that I don't want is to be taken the wrong way, but to me they weren't lives that were lost in vain, because a lot of people will learn from that. And a lot of people will change their lives from that. And to me, Politic Live, as much as we make songs about having fun, I won't touch on that <laughing, smiling> as much as we makes songs about partying and stuff like that and having fun and being opinionated and stuff like that. When it comes down to it though, we're three Black males in a time when Black males are not being represented appropriately by the media or hardly anything. Cause if you look at it, we lost two people last week and there was more media attention on that than there will be on the Black Achievement Awards that will be taking place this coming Saturday. And to me that hurts me because they're gonna take two isolated incidents that just happen to occur within the same week and blow that out of proportion and make that seem like that's the whole Black community, especially the Caribbean community. And yet when the awards are taking place this week here, I guarantee you there won't be anybody on the front cover saying that this person won this award for that, or these are the wonderful things that these Black youths are doing within the community.

So as far as us being political in any means or in any aspects, that's what we're probably the most vocal on. Cause if you look at it, our album, there's one song that should have made it on the album but didn't make it on the album called 'One To Grow On', where we kinda just look at the whole situation that led to one of our boys who got shoot on October 14 (2001) a couple years ago, Maurice Lang. And its like, one of the lines in it said…shoot, it was basically broken down like this, I'm gonna kick it to you and ya know…whatever you wanna do with it, it's like.
<Arlo begins rapping the lyric>

"Sometimes a mirror reflects what we hate the most,
trade to separate, we destroy your hopes,
a families with structure, the father, the mother,
the sun, moon and stars, as I spit these bars,
soldiers fight for placement,
emancipation and long promised reparations,
tell me, you ever look through the eyes of thugs,
empathetic such pain you shouldn't judge,
the most educated fleet the streets, they gotta eat,
branded by society, as thugs and thieves,
seeds of nappiness now breed fear,
seeds of prejudice media put there,
how can we tell Black children the sky's the limit
when their heroes are shoot before they reach their limit?
they want us to be motivated, to increase GDP's in countries in which we're hated…"

And it's like even the second verse, just basically breaks down a lot of these people like to pass judgment on a lot of these youths, and stuff. And it's like they're not giving them the opportunities they actually need to set themselves, to make themselves valuable citizens of the society. Society doesn't want them and yet when they do the only thing that many of them have… When they seek means that, that aren't really good means or whatever. All of a sudden society looks at them again and it's like they have no way of actually escaping.

A Black man drops off his resume at a job, they don't like it. The thing that is the most is that there is a lot of hidden racism that is here in Canada, that a lot of white people won't admit up to and no matter what you try to do to show them about it, a lot of them aren't really seeing it and it's like if… If a lot of these companies aren't willing to hire Black males or females, than don't get mad when you see those Black males or females doing things like selling drugs or anything like that, because you didn't look at their resume and yet you're going to pass judgment on them the moment they have to do whatever they have to do to feed their kids or pay their rent or whatever. And yeah, I could go on forever about this." (Interview with Arlo Maverick 2003: 5-7)

Arlo believes in the unification of the Black community, creating more accurate representations of Black people in media and representing positive images of Black youth. At the time I interviewed Arlo there were two major events that happened in the Black community in Edmonton, there were two gun shootings within the same week and the Black Achievement Awards. Arlo brings up both of these examples, stating that the media tended to focus on the shootings rather than the awards show. Sensational Edmonton Sun headlines stated "Crime seems to follow loud hall parties" (Halladay 2003: News 14) and "Killings rock Caribbean community" (Cowan and Palmer 2003: News 4). Somber Edmonton Journal headlines stated "Drive-by slaying at party blamed on gang"(Farrell 2003: A10) and "A regular boy drifted into trouble" (Farrell 2003: A1). The Edmonton Journal and Edmonton Sun, wrote several stories on the continuing gun violence among the Caribbean community and the danger of reggae hall parties; painting Caribbean youth in Edmonton as at risk and dangerous.

Although Politic Live has a variety of issues explored on their album 2003 Notoriety[13] from dating to tuition hikes and everyday life, Arlo states, "When it comes down to it though, we're three Black males in a time when Black males are not being represented appropriately by the media or hardly anything". If Politic Live is vocal about anything, it is about supporting Edmonton's Black community and creating a positive representation of what it means to be a Black youth during these times.

In the interview Arlo rapped a verse from "One To Grow On", these lyrics demonstrate how negative racist attitudes towards Black youth in Edmonton do not benefit the community as a whole. The lyrics promote a non-judgmental attitude. The lyrics in this verse are talking about how thugs too must eat and that those people that

society labels as 'thugs' are quite often very intelligent individuals who were never given the right opportunities. The next few lines that say, "seeds of nappiness now breed fear, seeds of prejudice media put there", speaks to the racism Black youth often face because of the negative images of Black youth in the media. This verse is inspired by a sad event, the murder of Arlo's peer Maurice Lang in 2001. The sadness in these lyrics speaks of youth who are never given a chance, youth who are fed false dreams and held back because of a racist society. As Arlo admits, "…there is a lot of hidden racism that is here in Canada, that a lot of white people won't admit up to and no matter what you try to do to show them about it, a lot of them aren't really seeing it…". By talking about these issues and trying to bring a positive light to the community, Arlo is attempting to get those people to "see it" and change their prejudices.

In the following, I ask about some of the prejudice people might hold against hip hop artists in Edmonton because they are not from American Black or Latino ghettoes:

> "Angele: I have a long question. So… Hip hop is said to have started in New York among Black and Latino youth, who were living in "ghettoes" right. And from that history that has been written about hip hop, hip hop is usually described by critics and academics and stuff like that as a culture or a music that represents marginalized youth, whether it be in terms of economics, like poverty or race or that those are the two main things. So, does this have an influence….does this type of history and description of hip hop have an influence on Edmonton hip hop, like why should there be a hip hop community in Edmonton in terms of this idea that hip hop comes from marginalized youth?
>
> Arlo: It's goes back to what I said to you in the beginning was like there's a voice of…there's a lot of Black youths in this city here and I'm just dealing with…I'm gonna touch on everything, but I'm deal with the Black community first. There's a lot of Black youths that are dealing with a lot of situations where there's not really too many like positive role model's or I wouldn't say positive role models but there's such a disproportionate representation of teenagers within this community, you're not seeing those people within the community actually receiving the attention, you're seeing the ones who are unfortunately put into bad situations and are involved in possibly guns, drugs or whatever it be. They're the ones who the media are paying attention too. The media's not paying attention to

> the ones that are out there trying to do something for the community. When we done 'Hip Hop for Hunger', we were having such a hard time to actually getting the media to actually give us any attention. A-channel was quite supportive but the Journal and some of these other people, and I'm not trying to hate on the Journal or anything like that, but we contacted them on many occasions and had we said that there was a shooting the night before or whatever. If I would have said there's someone at my house, there's a rapper at my house who's from Claireview, who just shot my daughter, they would be there right there, right on the spot." (Interview with Arlo Maverick 2003: 16)

Why should there be a hip hop community in Edmonton, there ain't no ghettoes here? Will according to Arlo, there may not be any American-style ghettoes in the city of Edmonton, but there is a Black community in Edmonton and the youth from this community need to see some positive role models that are coming from where they are. According to Arlo, Edmonton's Black youth need positive role models because the media tends to focus on criminal activity within the Black community and ignore the positive things that Black youth bring to the community. For example, "Hip Hop For Hunger" an annual fundraising event held over the Christmas period hosted by several local hip hop artists, that works towards collecting food for Edmonton's Food Bank, had a hard time finding media support in it's first year. Politic Live, Darkson Tribe, Tuffhouse Records, and War Party have all been supporters and performers at the two annual "Hip Hop For Hunger" fundraisers. But as one of the organizers for this event, Arlo noticed how youth involved in guns and drugs have gotten more media attention than "Hip Hop For Hunger". According to Arlo, positive youth need to be given more media attention within the city of Edmonton, and this is one of the roles that the hip hop community can fulfill.

In a lot of interviews with Edmonton hip hop artists, there was discussion on what needed to happen in order for their scene to grow national and international recognition. Artists talked about uniting the hip hop community, they also talked about internal

tensions that existed and the roles that needed to be fulfilled by the Edmonton hip hop community. The following is from my interview with Arlo where he speaks about what he believes would help the community grow:

> "Arlo: But one of the downfalls to it is if you look at it, Toronto despite the fact that it's got the Much Music and all these other things, if they didn't have a tight hip hop community they would not be where they are right now. And that's what Winnipeg needs to have, that's what Edmonton needs to have, that's what Calgary needs to have. You need to have guys who are actually seeing this on a business level and are willing to work together and network. You cannot have a strong hip hop community without actually having people who are business minded and actually understand the culture and the business both one in the same and are looking out for the business and art form one in the same and are looking out for the community, and the art form and business one in the same, the moment you have one without the other nothings gonna happen. (Interview with Arlo Maverick 2003: 15)
>
> Arlo: Because, the way that I see it is that honestly in this city we don't have leadership, we don't have direction, we don't have organization. Me I'm just a very, just anal and analytical person. Like I'm a person that, as much as I don't use my daytimer, as much as I should, I kind of like to have structure to life. Where it's like…and to me from the moment I came into this seeing this as… I believe that you have to merge business and artistry with, this is courtesy of Altered State Alliance, I've always seen that in order for us to be able to do that and for that to be possible, you have to have direction, you have to have leadership, you have to have organization. And right now in this city there's no one really taking the reins, as far as, "Okay well let's be an ambassador as far as like hip hop goes in Edmonton". Everyone is just seeing it as, "Okay well I'm gonna worry about what my crew does and if we end up making it big then we'll be the group that makes it big". No ones seeing it as, "Okay if we move together as a unit and we're all educated on what needs to be done, then we could all work together as a community". I'm just like that community guy who just like you know, I'd rather see us move as a unite than have us move this persons here, this persons there, the other persons down there, then this persons up here. Where it's like, if we all work together then we're all on the same plane so that when opportunity knocks we could be even bigger than Toronto. That's a huge feat, cause Toronto is like Canada's hip hop Mecca. But at the same time it's not something that is impossible. Like I said if two planes can fly into the World Trade Center than anything in this world is possible.
>
> And so as far as promoting hip hop, the reason I do it and I do it as much as I do is just based on the fact that there needs to be someone in the city here who pushes as much as I do. That's why when I seen… that's why cats like Advokit, Advokit I respect that guy so much for the amount of support and the support

preaching he does for the community. It's like he reps every single crew, Nutly Nuts, that guys holds it down taking photos, taking time out of his day to put on a website of what's going on in the hip hop community. Wreck who's hosting hip hop nights on Tuesdays, doing that free. It's like he takes that time out because he wants to see hip hop grow as a culture. Even the DJ's at CJSR, Mumps, myself, Miss. Trish, Shy-Guy when he was there… even the guys from the past, A-Okay, DJ Roach, a lot of those guys there put in a lot of their time because they realized that it…. that there's a community that's here. But unless we start playing out individual roles, than we'll never get to where we need to be. But even with us playing individual roles, there needs to be someone who is in there and being anal about things and saying "okay we need to do this" <snaps finger>, "we need to do this" <snaps fingers>, "let's do this" <snaps finger>, "let's do that". Throwing those ideas out, giving direction, providing some structure to it. Until we have structure, then we're never gonna get to where we need to be.

So I just want to see something occur here because I know what's possible here and I don't like to see talent go to waste. I'm seeing a lot of talent, especially from this next generation that's coming up, Black Blaze, Proveli Paragon, Peep Game, C.V's Finest. Not so much the older cats in C.V's but the younger cats, cause the older cats are around the same age as us, so we're playing on the same playing field. Where it's like…but I'm seeing so much potential in the ones that they're developing coming up right now and it's like there's so many… There's just like… If we don't actually get this thing correct and get this thing right, then ten years from now there's gonna be a cat sitting in a room similar to this, talking to someone similar to you, talking about how we need to actually start getting structure and organization and all that stuff and the cycles gonna repeat.

The whole fact that this past summer, in 2003, the first ever documentation of Edmonton's hip hop scene actually occurred, when we've had a hip hop scene from like the early 80's baffles me[14]. No one ever, it's not like no one ever thought about doing this, but it was never actually done. So many talked about it being done, but no one actually done it. It was finally done. I was just fortunate to be put into a place where I was approached by SEE magazine that said "well do you want to do this?". And me I jumped at the opportunity, cause it's like, wait this has never been done before. When I was doing, when I was trying to conduct research for it, it was so hard because so many people had never really seen the importance of actually documenting it. So there was a lot of information I wasn't able to get.

Where if you look at New York's hip hop scene, all that stuff is documented. Like you can go and find that stuff online, why can't we find it online for our own hip hop community. Why are we so obsessed with knowing someone else's past, present and future, and not being concerned about out own. If we don't know where we're coming from then we don't know where we're at and where we're going to. And as a community that's something that we need to do, but in order to

> get that we need to have leadership, we need to have direction and structure and organization." (Interview with Arlo Maverick 2003: 19-20)

According to Arlo Maverick the Edmonton hip hop community needs more leadership, direction, structure, organization, and unity, this is his vision for the community to be put on the map. Arlo believes that despite the media outlets available in Toronto, 'Canada's hip hop Mecca', it is the 'tight community' that has allowed hip hop artists to become successful in that city. This is the type of model that the Edmonton hip hop community needs to follow, they need to unit. Poetic Akin makes the same point about unity, "when people think of Canadian hip hop, they only think of the Rascalz, Kardinal Offishall, Choclair and Jully Black and all that stuff, now the funny thing is, like I said it a few minutes ago, that it all goes back to unity …that core group, they are a group, they're called The Circle, they're just doing individual things, it's like Wu-Tang, it's like when Wu-Tang came out they came out as a group and they did individual things that made them progress higher and faster" (Interview with Poetic Akin 2003: 6). Like many of the artists I interviewed, Poetic Akin and Arlo make the argument that a hip hop community that unites and combines resources will be more successful in the music market than a hip hop community that is individualistic.

In order for the E-town hip hop community to grow, artists need to think beyond their crews and themselves, they need to promote the community as a whole. Also, Arlo believes that a strong hip hop community needs people that "are actually seeing this on a business level and are willing to work together and network". A strong hip hop community needs both the business side and the artistic side, it needs "business minded people" that "actually understand the culture".

Arlo insists that "there's a community that's here", there are people in Edmonton that dedicate and volunteer their time to helping maintain the hip hop community. As Arlo stated there are people in Edmonton that volunteer their time to do such things as host radio shows, host hip hop nights, promote artists, take photos, write magazine articles and host websites; these are the behind the scenes underground people who are concerned about maintaining the culture.

Arlo also discusses how there is a lot of new talent coming up in the "new generation'. Within the Edmonton hip hop community there is discourse on a generational divide between 'young cats' and 'old cats'; young cats being the new generation of artists. Most of my interviewees were old cats. I got the understanding that old cats defined young cats as those artists that still needed to understand the meanings of hip hop culture. Young cats were also often defined as those artists that were more influenced by mainstream hip hop media (i.e. booty rap, gansta rap, bling bling rap), feeding into the consumerism of the 'Urban' style marketing. The old school described themselves as being more mature in the artistic and business aspects of the culture. According to old cats, new school cats need to understand the creativity of lyricism, artistic originality, a real love of hip hop, representing where you come from, and hip hop as an expression of self.

In the following Smarts, an old cat, describes his understanding of the different generations of artists in Edmonton:

> "… because right now cats who are 25 years old, in and around that ballpark, are really, like it's a different, we're sort of, you know there was the older cats who basically were already in their teens when this whole hip hop thing started, (when the) rap game started getting big back in the 80's, right. You know people who were born in early seventies, late sixties and then you've got us born in the late seventies who really, essentially grew up with this thing, like grew up with it, it's

been nothing but this. And so we saw it, like we really, born at the same time, grown, maturing at the same rate. They've got these younger cats, who were born and exposed to something in its adolescence. So they see it differently because they didn't see what we saw when it was young, the older cats see differently because they saw stuff from the seventies as well, the disco era and all those other things, and it was a very different world. So we're sort of like there's this couple years where we've really grown up and lived through all of it, seen it all, obviously we're not from Brooklyn, we're not living in the Bronx so we had a different perspective on things, but most definitely we grew up with it. I don't know I'd say so much as a divide, I'd like to think there's a lot we can learn from these older cats.

... I think definitely there's a difference of opinion on what (hip hop) means. The younger cats, you'll definitely find - again I'm generalizing I shouldn't generalize you can never really generalize there's always individual cases- but for the most part when you see younger cats, you'll see them basically looking the stereotype BET or I call it the MTV or BET stereotype, right. The double XL fitted hats, you know do-rags and all this type of thing, jersey-ed out, lots of fake bling, iced out, trying to bling out, trying to shine. You know they got a wine taste on a beer budget. Whereas some of these other cats are more grounded, the older cats, you'll definitely say there's a difference in outlook. But you need to get money to get shine, whereas that wasn't an opportunity back then, you just. You knew you were never gonna get anywhere, so you didn't try, you didn't try to look like a million bucks or front and pose and profile, you just did your thing." (Interview with Smarts 2003: 5).

I also spoke to some younger artists from Supreme Team, I asked them how older cats in the local scene have helped them and influenced their music. In the following Sharmz, a 21-year-old "brown guy"[15], describes the ways in which older cats school younger cats in the culture, the music, and the business of hip hop.

"They groom you into... they tell you... when you're in the studio what to do, what not to do. They teach what they've learned from, they teach you not only about actually rapping, they actually teach you about what you have to do beyond rapping to get yourself heard, you know. Stage presence, promotion, everything, production. Those are the types of things they teach you, cause (they've) gone through all the experience and you don't right. Especially for me, cause I'm just coming up and I'm learning from Aliby he's teaching me stuff, Arlo he's teaching me stuff. So that's the way it works." (Interview with Supreme Team 2003: 3-4)

According to my interview with Arlo Maverick and interviews with other Edmonton hip hop artists, a hip hop community exists within Edmonton. There is a

collective identity within this community. There is a belief that artists come together based on friendship and appreciation of each others musical skills, not on race, class, gender or political similarities or differences. In terms of the history of the growth of the hip hop community in Edmonton, attention is drawn to remembering a few renegade pioneering local artists, radio DJ's, and groups that strived in disseminating the culture in the city. Although most hip hop artists in Edmonton are striving towards making a profit off of their musical trade and 'making it big', the community is maintained through volunteer run events and media outlets. There are businesses and clubs that make money from the popular culture of hip hop, but the hip hop community often separated themselves from these purely commercial "mainstream" endeavors, making money off of the culture is acceptable as long as you contributed back to the culture of the community. Giving back to the community seemed to be very important, Arlo gave praise to several community members that volunteered their time keeping the culture going. Arlo also discussed how Black youth deserve less negative media attention in Edmonton and how the hip hop community can serve as a positive role model for these youth.

But Arlo also gave criticism to the organization of the community, claiming that there needs to be more unity and direction in order for the community to grow and gain recognition for their cultural production. Arlo and several other artists spoke very passionately for the need for the community to unite, uniting collectively identifying as the Edmonton hip hop community was seen as a solution to lack of economic infrastructure in the local entertainment industry and as a way of promoting the local scene.

The colorblind philosophy of hip hop culture and the belief that is it musical skills that bring artists together, the reverence given to historical pioneer figures in planting the seeds of hip hop culture in the city, the guidance older cats offer to young cats, and a vision towards unity, suggest a collective identity that define the Edmonton hip hop community. In the following section, I will describe how this community reacts towards the possibility of a local Urban radio station and the racial meanings surrounding the term 'Urban music'.

4.3 What is Urban Music?

On June 18, 2003 the CRTC held a public hearing in Edmonton for applicants who where interested in bidding for a radio frequency that had become available (CRTC 2004). Three of the nine applicants bidding for a new English language FM radio station in Edmonton at 91.7MHz, were proposing to provide Urban music programming (Austin-Joyner 2003). The prospect of a new Urban radio station in Edmonton is interesting when considering the perceived growth effects on the Edmonton hip hop community and the way in which Urban music is defined in the Canadian cultural context.

RJ Cui, an emcee of Darkson Tribe believes that his group isn't receiving the recognition it deserves: "It's a negative factor that there isn't a bigger radio station as far as urban music goes… I think we might be in a different place if we were getting played on a local station"(Austin-Joyner 2003). And Duff Roman of CHUM believes that although Edmonton is "not as overwhelmingly cosmopolitan with undeserved ethnic minorities as Toronto might be… there's a significant number of people of color and of multilingual interests we don't think are being served in a very hip, modern way" (Austin-Joyner 2003). An Urban radio station seemed to be the media outlet solution for

everyone, struggling hip hop artists and ethnic minorities of Edmonton, at least that is the case that has been made.

In April 2004 CHUM Limited, in partnership with Milestone Broadcasting Ltd. was "pleased to announce CRTC approval for a license to operate a newly created Urban-formatted FM radio station in Edmonton- the first of its kind in the city. VIBE 91.7 will offer a unique blend of culturally diverse Urban music styles that until now have been missing from the Edmonton market" (Real- E 2004). At this time Paul Ski, the Executive Vice President Radio of CHUM Limited, said "We're pleased to be partnered with Milestone, who pioneered the Urban music radio format in Canada, and to add our experience and resources to introduce a vibrant, innovative, culturally diverse radio service to Canada's fifth largest market" (Real-E 2004).

The promise of representing cultural diversity in a radio format and supporting the local artistic community were the strong selling points for the CHUM/Milestone application to the CRTC for a new Urban radio station format in Edmonton. The new radio station was "targeted to an audience aged 15 to 39", operating in an "Urban musical format" (CRTC 2004). The target audiences for VIBE are youth who listen to Urban music, particularly youth of color- they were the untapped market CHUM was proposing to serve.

CHUM/Milestone made promises to work with and invest in the local Urban music market. VIBE 91.7 is to establish a Local Advisory Board "to ensure that leading members of the community would have direct and effective input into programming policies and plans" (CRTC 2004). The new radio station is also supposed to exceed Canadian content requirements. The CRTC requires that on a weekly basis, a minimum

of 35% Canadian content music to be broadcast on the radio, but as "a part of its application CHUM/Milestone made a commitment to ensure, by condition of licence 40%" Canadian content (CRTC 2004). The CRTC "notes that the proposed level of Canadian content exceeds the minimum regulatory requirement, and would therefore provide enhanced exposure for Canadian music" (CRTC 2004). Exposure of more Canadian music opens the possibility of more airplay of Edmonton artist's music. Furthermore, VIBE 91.7 proposes to spend $4 million on Canadian talent development initiatives over the term of it's seven-year license (CRTC 2004).

What would a new Urban radio station bring to Edmonton? Although CHUM/Milestone promises to serve the culturally diverse demographic of Edmonton and benefit the Urban music market, that is all yet to seen. In the next section I will discuss the reactions artists had when I asked them about what they thought about an Edmonton Urban radio station and what the term "Urban music" meant to them. It is interesting to consider the discourse of serving a culturally diverse market and the idea that Urban music is the music of ethnic minorities, held by corporations like CHUM/Milestone, the CRTC and hip hop artists in Edmonton.

In my interview with DCG I asked the question: "What do you guys think about all the hype over Edmonton getting an Urban Radio Station? And what type of radio station would you support in Edmonton? And finally, do you think Edmonton is ready for a full-fledged Urban Radio Station?" (Interview with DGC 2003: 9). The following is their answer to that question:

> "Stray: Well this a… I like the idea of Edmonton having a radio station that's quote/unquote "Urban". But at the same time I disagree with a corporate radio station. Because I've experienced radio stations from other cities that are… quote/unquote "Urban" and they just play what's been paid, what's been paid to

play you know what I mean. So you're getting, you're not really getting exposed to a lot of the underground roots, the street roots of the hip hop music, you're getting exposed to like a Top-40 flavor. Like in Vancouver, it's basically the Sean Paul hour, I'm not dissing the guy, this is all they play. And Edmonton is ready for a radio station like this but I just know that it's not coming here because of the hip hop, it's coming here because of the money. They want to make money and they realize that Edmonton is spending a lot of money on this culture. So I do support it, but at the same time, I mean it's like a, it's almost like a catch twenty-two because as I want to see this kind of thing happen in Edmonton, it's gonna expose more people which is a positive thing, but they are going to be exposed to just Top-40 and glamorized Puff Daddy hip hop. You know so…it's a good thing and it's a bad thing. But what it's gonna do is make way for other underground, real street roots to expand in itself because with every, even if the Top-40's gonna evolve so is the underground. You know what I mean. So if the scene is getting big enough to have a commercial radio station owned by corporations then that means that the underground is also gonna expand with it. So this is a good thing. And that was Stray.

Touch: This is Touch. What would I think about the hype over the underground radio station? I don't really know the motives of all the applicants. I know the motives of two, I don't know, can I say their names?

A: Yeah Sure.

Stray: CHUM.

Touch: CHUM and 103, The Beat. Right?

Stray: But isn't that CHUM, cause there was that other one too, they came here.

Touch: Well okay. Let's… The names don't even matter this is what I mean. Okay. One of them said they would donate money, they're appealing to the Urban community, they gathered us all up and they said "Okay we're gonna donate money to the Canadian music industry, okay we really want to help the Urban people out". Okay. Another one, came to meet us in the studio and said "we're gonna give money to Edmonton's industry", but it is 5 times less than what the other one was gonna give to the Canadian industry. So basically, the way I look at it, whoever wants to help out Edmonton is who I'm with whether it be an Urban station from Toronto or a small station from Timbuktu whatever and that's all I have to say because I don't know the way radio station operate, the big ones. I know it's all about money. This guy says, "I'm gonna give you and your industry money". That's all I have to see. Whatever they play, play what they play. If they're helping me out, you can play whatever they want. Alright that's Touch.

<mumbling between all>

> Dice: I think it's great we're getting an Urban radio station, but in my opinion I don't think it's an Urban radio station. Cause like Stray and Touch were saying, it's gonna be an explosion of Top-40ness <laughter between all> on the radio station and basically to me Top-40 isn't Urban, to me. Urban to me means stuff you don't really hear on the radio, but as we all know radio stations aren't there to help an artist, they're just there to promote an artist that already is successful. I mean to me really, it doesn't really matter if we get an Urban or not. I don't really care cause it's gonna mean no difference to me, it's not gonna make an ounce of difference because whether they play my album or Stray's album or Touch's album then, well I'm getting off topic, but they're not there to play our stuff. Like if they could help us then that would be great, that could give us exposure to real Urban music but I don't think they're ready to do that. I don't think it's the Canadian way to help the starving artists coming out of places like Edmonton. I mean, a lot of people think that Edmonton is a far, far away place in Northern Alberta <laughter>. Andthe markets here, finally to get Urban, but to everyone else it's gonna seem Urban except us. All the power to the Urban, but I wish they'd play more 'Urban'. That's Dice" (Interview with DCG 2003: 9-10)

Stray likes the idea of Edmonton having an Urban radio station, but he sees a catch twenty-two with the corporate aspect of radio stations. He disagrees with a corporate Urban radio station because they tend to only play a Top-40 play list and because of their profit based mentality they will only expose the Edmonton public to more pop music. One benefit Stray sees from an Urban radio station is that the hip hop underground will grow as a result of the mainstream growing. Touch will support any Urban radio station that comes to Edmonton, as long as they are willing to give funding to the Canadian music industry, regardless of the radio play list. Dice gives a nice summary to the whole discussion on an Urban radio station in Edmonton. But to Dice "Urban" means the underground, to the music industry "Urban" means pop music that makes money. To Dice "Top-40 isn't Urban", Urban music is defined as not being pop music.

Most artists I interviewed had similar concerns about an Edmonton Urban radio station, they felt it would give the Edmonton public more exposure to Urban music

opening the market up for local hip hop artists music. They also felt that any funding an Urban radio station could give to local artists was a benefit. But a majority of artists I interviewed were suspicious of a corporate run radio station, they were afraid that it would only play a Top-40 Urban music format, ignoring the underground jams or conscious lyrically charged hip hop. They were also concerned that the promises of funding local artists made by the new radio station would not be fulfilled. As Smarts put it: "What this new station's gonna do remains to be seen. If they could truly support, support the local community that's gonna be there supporting them, then it's a good thing. If they're just gonna plan to take without ever giving back then it's a bad thing" (Interview with Smarts 2003: 6).

There was also another interesting reaction to the possibility of Edmonton getting an Urban radio station. Arlo Maverick of Politic Live, Taro of Shogun Entertainment and Poetic Akin of CJSR, believed that Edmonton artists need to step up their game if they are to benefit from a media outlet like an Urban radio station. Arlo understands that there isn't enough promotion of local artists in Edmonton, but local artists need to be prepared professionally to benefit from media outlets:

> "Right now in the city there's not enough promotion going into a lot of these events here. A lot people are expecting their names to sell them. And unfortunately we don't have the m.. lia where we could say that "okay well Tough House records videos are being played everyday, so people could automatically recognize and the name will register". CJSR has Urban Saturdays and on Urban Saturdays you'll certain hip hop cats once a week. So we don't have that consistent level of promotion all the time and I think that if we had those resources where…we don't necessarily…The thing about it is that an Urban radio station here would be good. But at the same time it's only as good if we're ready for it. Cause if it comes into town and all of a sudden cats are still unaware of how to actually write a bio, how to actually format their demo and knowing the certain structure of a radio edit. Then you set yourself back by not being prepared when opportunity knocks…But if we're not really prepared for a lot of those resources that could come down here through an Urban radio station then what's the point

of us all saying we really need an Urban radio station." (Interview with Arlo Maverick 2003:11-12)

To Poetic Akin it doesn't really matter if a new Urban radio station in Edmonton was corporate or independently run, in order to benefit from an Urban radio station what matters is that artists need to come with a good product:

> "As long as the emcees here or not just emcees but any artist the plays Urban music, that's R&B or dance hall or anything or rap. As long as they come with good product I can't see the program directors at an independent radio station or a big radio station wouldn't want to play their music, that's one thing that the artists have to do, they have to give them the best product" (Interview with Poetic Akin 2003:4).

Taro also believes local Edmonton hip hop artists need to be more professional in order to benefit in media outlets, particularly understanding the "big wall" of industry:

> "There's a lot of cats in Edmonton that'll try to go to a radio station and they won't know how to be diplomatic or they don't realize they're up against (industry)… the big wall, there's a big wall. You have to be professional, everything on point to get there and not everybody is professional enough to be represented on the radio or in the industry, cause they're swearing on their tracks, they don't have radio cuts." (Interview with Shogun 2003:15-16)

After asking the members of DGC what they thought about the possibility of a new Urban radio station, out of curiosity I asked them what they thought about the term "Urban". I asked, what does the term Urban mean?[16] What is 'Urban music'?

> "Touch: …Urban is a way to, you know what it is, it's a way to straighten out the shelves at HMV.
>
> Stray: Yup, yup.
>
> Touch: It's a way to categorize a whole group of music. Instead of saying hip hop, instead of saying R&B, instead of saying Dance, instead of saying Techno, instead of saying Drum and Beat, instead of saying Reggae. What you are basically doing is grouping all the 'colored' music into one big category <laughing in sarcastic tone>.
>
> Stray: If you can stick an Ethnic face on it, it's Urban.

Touch: That's Urban because that's where we hang out in the streets right. All the 'coloreds' hang out in the streets, man <sarcastic tone>.

Stray: They should just call it street music

Touch: Like what? There's emcees from farms man, that ain't no urban area. <laughter>

Stray: Bubba Sparxx.

Touch: Yeah he ain't from no urban area. <laughter between Stray and Touch>

Dice: There's whole emcees from like Sherwood Park.

Touch: It's just a word that means absolutely nothing. That's why when they say Urban station, it doesn't mean what they, like Urban station could be anything, it could be 24 hour Drum and Base. We don't know what they're gonna bring on us, so it's all about the money. If you're gonna help 'us' out, the community, let's do it." (Interview with DGC 2003:11)

To Touch and Stray the term Urban meant music created by ethnic minorities, music from the streets. So when the music industry is talking about Urban music, they are actually talking about music made predominantly by non-white artists. In this sense, as Touch states, Urban is a meaningless term, it is just a way to categorize music. Urban is a racialized terms used to describe cultural practices influenced by predominantly racially marginalized groups in urban centers.

For Poetic Akin and Smarts, Urban is the new way of categorizing Black music. When I asked Smarts what Urban meant to him, this was his response: "That's a good question, that's a good question. What's Urban music? Everybody says Urban this, Urban that. What's Urban? Urban is the code word for Black music right (Interview with Smarts 2003:6)". Poetic Akin had a very similar answer: "When somebody says Urban music, I automatically think Black music. I know I shouldn't put a title on it. But that's what I think about it, that's Urban music" (Interview with Poetic Akin 2003:7).

Touch and Stray's discussion, was a good starting point to understanding the term Urban. Including Touch and Stray's answers, there were about four different answers I would get when I asked artists what the term Urban meant to them: Urban music is music created by ethnic minorities, Urban music is music created by Black people, Urban music is pop music- the current Top-40 list, Urban is a meaningless term merely a way to categorize culture.

Although most artists explained Urban music as a racialized term that describes the music genre of the ethnic minority, Taro discussed Urban music in terms of the white majority demographic of Edmonton and the types of industries present in the city. The following is an excerpt from the dialogue between Taro and Musa on the possibility of an Urban radio station in Edmonton.

> "Taro: But I might also support a public radio station too. But you know there's different…like a public radio station in Edmonton is gonna be playing for a certain demographic, there's not gonna be that. But if we have an Urban radio station where is the demographic? Is it out there? Will yeah, we got lots of middle-class white youth, yeah maybe it will work, you know what I mean. Because yeah we're a blue collar town. How many kids love Eminem in Edmonton? I bet you every white middle-class youth has some appreciation for him and maybe has a poster or a CD kicking around somewhere. (Interview with Shogun 2003: 16)

> Taro: Now are Edmonton…see, what people don't understand is that the Edmonton industry, there's the business side and then there's the underground side. The business side is thin, like how many businesses in Edmonton are gonna support an Urban station? Or actually are gonna say "I'm gonna advertise with this station". Not many people want their businesses associated with 50 Cent or Eminem, maybe Eminem, maybe not so many 50 Cent or Obie Trice or whoever. They don't want to associate their business with them because in Edmonton the businesses here aren't really about entertainment, they're about, I don't know what they're about? It's an oil industry city maybe, we an oil industry here, you know what I mean. The real money is not in the entertainment industry, and until the entertainment industry grows, as you have more movie productions, more radio/video that type of thing, more clubs, more those things. You don't really have the industry supporting. Like if you were able to get every club in Edmonton to support a new album. And say, "Look all you DJs in all these clubs, can you

support this album that's coming out? Will you play it? Will you rotate it?" They'll say: "Yeah". But that alone will not reach enough people to sell thousands of copies of CDs.

Musa: But the thing too also is the fact that, people don't know, but Edmonton has a lot of talent. Extreme amount of talent. Not just Edmonton but even like in Canada. As far as like you know going to, a lot of Canadians have to go to the States to get their stuff going. And the States embraces them and all of a sudden you see… Like a lot of these big names, for example, speaking actors, are Canadian, most of the big time guys. And it's because we're not giving them an avenue to actually do something."
(Interview with Shogun 2003:18)

Taro recognizes the white middle-class youth demographic who are major consumers of hip hop culture and are the racial majority in the city of Edmonton. Taro even brought up Eminem, a commercially successful skilled white rapper, whom according to Taro "every white middle-class youth has some appreciation". So according to Taro, Edmonton has a great deal of white middle-class youth and they are major consumers of hip hop, furthermore with the commercial success of Eminem, white youth in Edmonton will support a Urban radio station.

But Taro also brings the fact that in hip hop there is the business side and the underground, the underground being the cultural aspects. According to Taro Edmonton does not have a big entertainment industry, and is more working class or oil industry based. Taro asks "how many businesses in Edmonton are gonna support an Urban station?" How many businesses in Edmonton are willing to advertise on such a station? What businesses in Edmonton are willing to financially contribute to an Urban radio station, that features Black artists like Obie Trice or 50 Cent.

According to CHUM/Milestone Edmonton is a good market for an Urban radio station, because the city is culturally diverse enough to appreciate Urban music. As Touch and Stray explain Urban music is what the mainstream considers music created by

ethnic minorities; Poetic Akin and Smarts explain Urban music as the new code word for Black music; Stray and Dice describe Urban music as the new top-40 pop music. Urban music is music created by ethnic minorities, predominantly Black artists, and it has become the new pop music of the millennium. As Taro points out, the primary consumers of hip hop are middle-class white youth, but Edmonton industry may not be ready to support music with a Black or 'ethnic' face attached to it. Urban is a category to neatly categorize music created by ethnic minorities, this music is the new pop music, perhaps it is the ethnic or Black face attached to this music that makes it a spectacle to be marketed.

But who is Urban music marketed for? The ethnic communities who's images represent what Urban music is or the white audience who consumes this image? The radio corporation's claim is that they are investing in the Edmonton market because it is ethnically diverse enough to afford an Urban radio station, so are they doing this with the interest of ethnic communities in mind?

Who Urban music is marketed for is not clear? What is clear is that Urban music is a racialized term for music that represents ethnic minorities to the mainstream. Although there are benefits of having ethnic minorities represented in media, since in the past there was a disproportionate bias for whites in media images. And the artists of Edmonton would appreciate funding and investments to help their community grow, the intentions behind the corporate sponsorship of Urban music are still under suspicion. Urban music as Touch explained is a meaningless term, it lumps all music by ethnic minorities into one category, essentializing ethnic minorities into one category. Urban music may represent cultural diversity for media corporations, but it does not make sense to lump all this diversity into just one category.

4.4 Conclusion

According to Cumberland rap music took a while to develop in Canada, it's growth was initiated by Black communities and the products of the pop culture were consumed by the white majority.

> "Rap music was slow to develop in Canada, owing partly to the fact that ghettoes are rare even in the largest cities, where Canadian rap was born. Unlike the USA, rap soon moved away from Canadian black communities and had reverse "integration" effect, its fashions, slang, and behavior adopted predominantly white, middle-class youth…
> Despite its growing popularity in the United States, rap was introduced only gradually in Canada, gaining new listeners thanks to the initiative of a few people living within black communities, mostly from Caribbean backgrounds, in Toronto, Halifax, and Montreal, where the first rappers emerged" (Cumberland 2001: 309)

A lot of the first DJ's to play hip hop, reggae and R&B were actually Black and they disseminated this music through dance hall parties and through the radio station 88.5 CJSR (Interview with Arlo Maverick 2003; AM 2003). But a lot of the first emcees, break dancers and DJ's who began the hip hop movement in Edmonton were Caucasian, Aboriginal, Black or of Asian descent. And as Taro points out, a majority of the consumers of hip hop are white middle class youth. This narrative is similar to Cumberland's story of hip hop culture starting among the ethnic minorities and growing to a point where white consumers were picking it up. But the narrative of local hip hop artists of their communities history is not so racialized. Hip hop artists in Edmonton do not base the establishment of their community on similarities or differences on race, culture, class or gender; but on the similarity of practicing hip hop culture. The artists of Edmonton base the coming together of crews on friendship, geography and appreciation of each others musical abilities and aesthetics. Although they are aware that the context of racial similarities may draw some people together, it is not the major determinant of

bringing the community together. In fact, they despise being categorized by race, ethnicity, class or gender. This is apparent in the way they view 'Urban music' to be a racializing term that categorizes all music that represents music created by ethnic minorities in popular culture. The Edmonton hip hop community does not define itself on racial differences or similarities, it defines itself as being accepting of any individual regardless of race, ethnicity, class or gender, as long as that individual has some artistic integrity and can contribute to the communities culture.

In terms of the corporate funding and investment that an Urban radio station can bring to Edmonton, it appears that the hip hop community and the rap music industry have different interests. Artists are caught in between, cultural beliefs against being categorized and the financial stability a corporate radio station can offer. Edmonton hip hop artists are in a contradictory situation, between the mainstream commodification of hip hop music and as cultural practitioners making music on their own terms, between the mainstream and the underground, between the industry and the culture, between being an artist and being an entrepreneur.

In the following chapter, there is a focus on hip hop as a culture in itself, continuing in the discussion of the contradictory situation of Edmonton artists and the anti-racist politic that exists within the community. The cultural beliefs opposing racism and racialization within hip hop will be further explained in the next chapter.

4.5 Endnotes

[1] www.politiclive.com , www.shogunentertainment.com , www.supremeteam.org , www.cvsfinest.com , www.warparty.cjb.net , www.darksontribe.com , www.urbanmetropolis.com , www.hiphopcanada.com

[1] Spit is a term that means to rap or to rhyme.

[1] 182 was a crew that formed from the west end of Edmonton, they all lived on or near 182 Street and that is where the name came from. Another crew is WON18, which is named after 118 Avenue on Edmonton's rough north-east neighborhood.

[1] T.E.D.D.Y created a name for himself on CJSR, from the early 80's, for almost two decades DJing the show The Black Experience in Sound, the "finest urban radio show that ever hit radio in Edmonton" (AM 2003:24).

[1] "In 1986, Don Joyce hosted a show called Nite Flight on CKER 1480 from 12 midnight till 4 am on Friday and Saturday night, until 1989 when his show was cancelled because he couldn't get enough advertising" (AM 2003: 23). In 1989 Don Joyce continued his legacy through Hot Cable FM, playing four hours of reggae, hip hop, R&B/Funk (AM 2003: 24).

[1] The Maximum Definitive was a 10 member hip hop group that was composed of dancers, emcees and a vocalist. "By 1993, they had become members of Canada's hip hop scene with their video "The Jungle Man", they were nominated a Juno Award that year (AM 2003: 25).

[1] Altered State Alliance was composed of Touch (formerly Trav'l), Deadliss (formerly Point Blank), and NEX. The group formed to create experimental music, "representing the next generation of Edmonton's 182 faction", "they carried on a notorious legacy of great lyrical minds from Edmonton's west end" (AM 2003: 27).

[1] Poetic Akin hosted Underground Sounds for CJSR. Minister Faust has been hosting CJSR shows since the 1990's with his Afrocentric politics and sounds. A-Okay was a pioneer artist, recorded with the legendary Toronto Beat Factory, he was a "white rapper in Hip Hop's infant stages" who faced prejudice from "people not recognizing his talent because of his color" (AM 2003: 24). A-Okay also hosted CJSR's On Nation Under A Groove from 1988-1992 (AM 2003:24).

[1] Task Force, was a hip hop crew from Edmonton that in 1992 was the first from the city to release a video. Through VideoFact they released "Raise Yo Fist", "a statement about fighting for your love of Hip Hop music (AM 2003: 25).

[1] In 1991, Deadliss and A-Okay were featured on the Simply Majestic compilation album, "We United To Do This". The album won a "Juno for best dance compilation and was one of the highest selling dance records at then time" (AM 2003: 25).

[1] Dangerous Goods appeared on the Dig Ya' Roots compilation album which was a "Canadian local talent development initiative of the National Campus and Community Radio Association (NCRA)" (AM 2003:29).

[1] Referring to the shooting of 20 year old Keith Raglon at a reggae hall party at Athlone Community Hall in Claireview (Farrell 2003: A1) and the drive by shooting killing 25 year old Eleazor Robert Giroux (Cowan and Palmer: News 4).

[1] Notoriety explores a variety of issues including tracks such as "Dating 101", Student Finance", the playful macho track "Big Tings" and a track discussing jealousy and competitive situations titles "Hatrix".

[1] Arlo Maverick wrote an eight page article in SEE Magazine, documenting the history of hip hop in Edmonton. In this article Arlo accounts the many accomplishments of Edmonton hip hop artists.

[1] Refer to the field notes in the appendix. In my first conversation with Sharmz, he identified himself as a "brown guy".

[1] My interview with DGC was my second interview out of eight interviews, I realized that the term "Urban" was a loaded racialized term, so in every interview after that one I tried asking the two questions. The "Interview with War Party" was the only interview in which Urban radio stations and the term "Urban music" were not discussed.

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Chapter 5: Hip Hop a Culture in Itself

In my interviews with Edmonton hip hop artists, I asked questions assuming hip hop was a culture in itself. I was inquiring about the cultural norms and beliefs of this culture called hip hop, specifically the ideas surrounding the concept of race. In order to explore the idea of hip hop as a culture, I will discuss the ideas surrounding a distinctly Canadian hip hop culture and the question of whether or not hip hop belongs to anyone.

First, I will discuss how Edmonton artists describe what makes Canadian hip hop distinct and how it fits in the global culture of hip hop. I will use the interviews with Dangerous Goods Collective and Shogun Entertainment to demonstrate how Edmonton hip hop artists explain Canadian hip hop culture.

Next, I will describe how Edmonton hip hop artists identified with hip hop as a culture, and if hip hop belongs to any specific race or culture. I will use the interviews with Dangerous Goods Collective and War Party, to answer questions of how hip hop culture relates to race. The interview with War Party will demonstrate how hip hop can be used to empower Native youth and the complexities of identity in the context of colonization, religion, ethnic culture, racial identities, and hip hop culture. The interview with Dangerous Goods Collective will demonstrate how hip hop exists despite cultural and ethnic differences in the group. As well, how hip hop as a culture is believed to have evolved past race and how hip hop music can be considered a translatable language.

Through these interviews it will become apparent that artists identify with hip hop as a culture in itself and how certain beliefs about race relations emerge. It will become apparent that hip hop culture holds ideals of seeing past racial differences and that identities are formed around the social space of music.

5.1 Canadian Hip Hop: Polite and Politically Correct?

In my interviews I was interested in the way artists situated Canadian hip hop compared to American hip hop, and how they situated themselves in Canadian hip hop and within the globalization of hip hop culture. I asked the artists of DGC and Shogun, "Do you think Canadian hip hop has a distinct sound or flavor compared to hip hop from other places in the world?". The following is the discussion between DGC surrounding that question:

> "Stray: You're saying…Oh here we go [adjusting recorder]…
> It definitely does have it's own sound, it's distinct and I think you can find out, find it a lot even the content of what the kids are talking about. You know a lot of people try to emulate what they hear, but they're still gonna sound different even if they try to imitate Snoop Dog or something like that, you're still gonna hear a different… I think it's because of the way we speak, a little bit different accents, but Canada definitely has a different flavor and it doesn't seem to be segregated like a lot of people think East and West and this kind of stuff. And that's changing a lot in the States too, that's mostly just media. But as far as Canada's concerned there is not really East and West, there's like, people do this kind of sound coming from North West Territories or B.C or Newfoundland, there's not real segregation of the sound, so Canada is I think has it's definite own sound. That's Stray.
>
> Touch: Yup Canada has it's own sound, like Stray was saying, the accent. You can't mistake that anywhere you go, you know you're Canadian it doesn't matter. People are willing to accept other accents when it comes to hip hop now. I remember when it used to be just mad New Yorkers even before L.A blew up, and the hip hop scene was New York, New York, New York that's all I heard. Another thing I gotta a plug the album 'Dig Ya Roots' done by National Campus Radio Association and a bunch of Canadians managed to drop a whole album like 12 or 15 songs or something. Not one of those songs, even though they didn't know each other, not one of those songs was "I'm pimpin' this chick or I'm shootin' this gun or I'm a gangster" and it just shows that hip hop that makes albums in Canada, like really good hip hop is original. So I mean there you go, it's not gonna sound like what's out there, cause what's out there is a lot of American hip hop. So we're original, suppose that. I've never heard an album without a gun going off in a long time. Man I couldn't believe it was the one we were on <laughter>. That's sweet, I like that, cause it just represents us as Canadians. We do hip hop because we love hip hop not because we're forced into hip hop, cause we're either selling crack or doing hip hop <laughter>. Yeah that's what I gotta say, Touch.

> Dice: This is Dice. Yeah hip hop in Canada is unique in itself, I guess. It's true what these guys were saying about American hip hop and Canadian hip hop. You do hear less gun shoots in Canadian hip hop and we pretty much say all of our words properly, so it's a pretty big difference. Americans tend to use quite a bit of slang. I think that it just depends, to say that Canadian hip hop is like…that's hard to explain I guess. To me Canadian hip hop is just, the guys that are themselves and have their own sound. Cause I mean you could be Canadian and do hip hop and sound like Snoop Dog or Tupac or whatever, you're not gonna say that's Canadian cause you're copying someone, but I guess Canadian hip hop is identifying itself as super unique. Nobody in the world is doing hip hop like the Canadians. I mean everyone is trying to sound like someone but at least we can have the label of saying we're actually Canadian and we have Canadian hip hop and that could be recognized throughout the world and people will be like "that's pretty much Canadian". Cause there's no fooling someone that you're not from Canada. And I'm glad hip hop is going in that direction for the Canadians. And hopefully in ten more years we'll be just as popular as the Americans. Yeah, that's Dice." (Interview with DGC 2003:16-17)

Canadians sound "Canadian" when they make hip hop music. According to Stray, even if an artist tries imitating the sound of a mainstream artist like Snoop Dog, that artist will still sound different. Canadians have a specific accent when they speak English and this accent comes out when they make rap. For Stray and Touch it is this distinct Canadian accent that is recognizable, in Canadian hip hop. Furthermore, according to Touch now that hip hop has become so globalized, different accents in rap are acceptable and the norm in the culture. Another distinct aspect of Canadian hip hop that DGC recognize, is that Canadian hip hop is cleaner than American hip hop. Touch gives the example of the National Campus Radio Association compilation album of "Dig Ya Roots that DGC is featured on, apparently this album does not have any songs that focus on subjects of pimping, shooting guns or bragging about being a gangster. To Touch a lot mainstream hip hop focuses on these subjects, therefore Touch is proud of the fact that Canadian hip hop does not always follow the standard American mainstream gangster

style. According to Touch, "Dig Ya Roots" does not have any gunshots going off on it and it is a distinctly original Canadian album because it strays away from the American mainstream gangster standard.

Dice also shares some of the same sentiments towards Canadian hip hop. According to Dice, Canadian hip hop has less gun shoots going off on it, and "we pretty much say all of our words properly". Compared to American artists who tend to use more slang. For Dice, Canadian hip hop is more proper and grammatically correct. But to Dice, "Canadian hip hop is just, the guys that are themselves and have their own sound". As long as an artist is true to themselves, expressing who they are and not copying another artist, they are a Canadian hip hop artist in Dice's books.

I think Touch said it best when he said, Canadians don't do hip hop because their only other choice is selling crack, "We do hip hop because we love hip hop". For artists like Touch, hip hop is a choice not the only option. In this sense, what maybe be implied by Touch's statement is that hip hop is not a way out of a disadvantaged situation, but is it more of a chosen leisure activity.

When I interviewed Taro and Musa of Shogun Entertainment, they also spoke about Canadian hip hop. Admittedly, my interview with Taro and Musa was more messy than my other interviews, they tended to answer questions before I asked them, I am still trying to decide whether that made me a bad interviewer or it made them great interviewees. The following is from that interview, this excerpt focuses on what is means to be Canadian and what Canadian hip hop means to them:

> "Angele: So does your guys'? Does the music of your guys' culture influence your music? Are you Japanese? <question directed at Taro>
>
> Taro: I'm Japanese yeah. Oh yeah it's influenced me for sure.

Musa: I, yeah, totally, yeah totally. Because within Canada it's a very multicultural place, right? And….

Angele: So do the sounds come out in your music? Or?

Musa: Yup.

Taro: Yup. Well with me and him, I know for myself and him it does. And people will say it: "oh you got a distinct sound, you sound like, you got a sound". You know what I mean.

Musa: You can't forget where you came from, you know. It's engrained in us anyways.

Taro: But Canada as a whole is, I consider it, very, very lacking in culture. Strong Canadian hip hop culture, no such thing, really no such thing. Strong hip hop culture, universal. Okay hip hop culture is universal, cause the elements in hip hop; breakdancing, music DJing, what else is there. Universality of hip hop. But Canadian has…you know what Canadian hip hop is? It's very politically correct, correct hip hop is what it is.

Angele: There's no swearing or?

Taro: No swearing, they don't talk about gang banging, that's Canadian hip hip. They talk about Canadian, a couple Canadian things. But they don't talk about gang related things, they don't talk about gangsterism, you know what I mean, the drugs, they don't really go on about that. American music, they go on about that, you know why, because it's there it's not here. We don't have guns in the street as much here, as we have guns in the street in America. Cause in America you can have a gun in your house and you don't even…nothing. You know what I mean, in Canada it's for real.

Musa: Also, Canadians I think a lot…

Taro: Culture there's a difference.

Musa: And we're also influenced by Americans. Whether we like to admit it or not.

Taro: This is what I see Canada, you know I see Canada represented as a guy, is white dude, Canadian hip hop, a white dude singing 50 Cent's latest hook, you what I mean, it's humorous. It's almost like…Canada is a white country really. It's like descendents of the queen of England and they all landed here and they set up this establishment and "oh bring them over, bring the immigrants over". And

you got immigrants coming here, right. That's what this country is, no one can tell me different. Okay.

Musa: But we're also little sister or little brother of America, but we try not to be.

Taro: And, and yeah. We're the little sibling of America, cause America was the big one that got away from England <laughter>. You know: "Forget you, we're doing our own thing over here, we got our own house". We're just the little guy, Canada has it's work cut out for it." (Interview with Shogun 2003: 19-20)

Taro is a Japanese Canadian who began as a jazz musician and is now a producer of hip hop music. Musa is originally from Kenya and Uganda, who began as a breakdancer and is now a conscious emcee. I wanted to ask them if their ethnic backgrounds influenced the type of music they made, I asked them in a very indirect clumsy way. The interview was our first meeting and I did not build a comfortable enough rapport with them to ask questions about their ethnic or racial backgrounds. This is yet another example of the sensitive nature of interviewing Canadian ethnic minorities on subjects of race and ethnicity, despite my own ethnic minority identity.

Well, both Taro and Musa said that their ethnic background does influence the music they make. Taro claims to have a distinct sound. Musa notes that Canada is a "very multicultural place" and that "You can't forget where you are from… It's engrained in us anyways".

According to Taro, Canadian culture is lacking as a whole and there is no such thing as a strong Canadian hip hop culture, but there is a strong universal hip hop culture. When I heard Taro say this I thought, maybe there isn't really any real national Canadian cultural identity and maybe Canadian hip hop still has a lot of growing to do to become internationally recognized as a distinctly nationally form of hip hop. But maybe it's just

that Taro identifies more with a universal global hip hop culture, than with a Canadian culture.

What Taro does say is that Canadian hip hop is politically correct, there's no swearing and "they don't talk about gang banging" (note how Stray, Touch and Dice refer to Canadian hip hop as "we" and how Taro refers to Canadian hip hop as "they", which makes me still wonder if Taro relates more to a global hip hop). Taro believes that Canadians don't rap about gangsterisms because there are fewer guns in Canadian streets compared to American streets.

In the above excerpt Taro and Musa have an interesting short dialogue about Canada's relationship with America. According to Musa, Canada is influenced by America, "whether we like to admit it or not" and that Canada is the little sibling of America. To Taro, Canadian hip hop is represented as a "white dude" singing along to the latest hook off of an African American gangsta rap. Taro plainly says that "Canada is a white country", "descendants of the queen of England", and a country established by immigrants.

Canadian hip hop is distinctive based on the recognizable Canadian accent, the proper grammar, and the use of less slang and gangster content. The members of DGC are proud of Canadian hip hop, a form of music that is more original because it strays away from the American mainstream gangster standard.

The members of DGC and Shogun describe Canada a having less crime than America and Canada does not have disadvantaged ghettoized urban minorities like America. Canadians speak more proper, grammatically correct English with a distinct canuck accent. As Musa points out, Canada is a multicultural place. According to Touch,

hip hop culture is accepting of every accent, including the Canadian accent. It appears that these artists consider Canada a friendlier place than America and this is the cultural context they situate Canadian hip hop.

One the other hand, Taro of Shogun does not seem to be very optimistic about Canadian hip hop. To him Canada is lacking in culture and in it's own hip hop culture, and standing in the shadow of big brother America "Canada has it's work cut out for it". In his metaphor of Canada as a little sibling, Taro does not specifically say he is talking about economic or cultural influence, regardless the American music industry has a greater international economic and cultural influence than the Canadian music industry. It appears that Edmonton hip hop artists situate Canadian hip hop culture in comparison to American culture and economics. In the next section I will discuss how War Party and DGC identify with hip hop culture. And how they believe hip hop is related to other cultures and how hip hop relates to specific races, if at all. Through this discussion complex racial and ethnic identities will emerge, as well the cultural belief that hip hop culture has evolved past distinguishing racial or cultural differences and that it is how one relates to music that matters in hip hop culture.

5.2 Who's Culture is it?

In all of my interviews, I had a section of questions I called "Who's culture is it?". In the "Who's culture is it?" questions, I asked artists if they thought hip hop belonged to any specific race or culture, what culture they identified with as their own and basically how race relates to who can make hip hop music. When I interviewed War Party, I asked: What culture do you identify as your own? And who does hip hop belong to? Does hip hop belong to a specific race? There answers offered a lot of insight into the condition of

Aboriginal youth identities on reserves and how hip hop as a music can be used for positive means.

When I asked the members of War Party a question on what culture they identified with, to them the question was translated into a question of what religion they identify with. I found this reaction very interesting, but not strange. Considering the history of the colonization of Natives peoples in Canada, in which we were made to sign treaties, forced to live on reservations and our children were placed in Christian residential schools. The Canadian government had a plan of culturally assimilating Native peoples by teaching us Christianity and English, committing a cultural genocide on our native languages and religions. Therefore, when the members of War Party translated a question of culture into a question of religion, as a Native person it did not surprise me, considering our forced cultural assimilation into European Christian belief systems.

Rex gives a narrative of his spiritual growth and how he was influenced by two belief systems: "my mom raised me as a catholic when I was a kid, so they kind of pounded that religion in the parents and grandparents heads, my mom kind of pounded that religion into my head when I was growing up. I took what was good out of that, and I pray, sometimes in catholic I guess. When I was older and I started realizing who I was and where I came from, I kind of leaned more towards more to Native spirituality" (Interview with War Party 2003: 11-12). According to Rex, Native spirituality taught him about who he is and the history of Native people. Rex attends sweat lodges and says that pow wow was "one of the greatest things that happened to me in my life" (Interview with War Party 2003: 12).

But Rex admits that he is probably believes in about half Native spirituality and half Catholicism (Interview with War Party 2003: 12). Rex credits both his mother and father for teaching him his spirituality: "if it wasn't for my mom's strong faith in catholic religion, when I was a kid I think I would've known the difference between right and wrong. But I'm also thankful, equally thankful for my dad showing me the world of who I was and where I came from. And sure there was a lot of shit there that I had a hard time reflecting about what happened. But there was also a ton of beautiful things there that really, really made me feel just amazing about who I was, and a lot of it was culture (Interview with War Party 2003: 12). Both religions have shaped who Rex is today and he wants to share his spirituality with others, but he's not about going "around preaching be traditional or be catholic, just the fact of having God in our life" is enough (Interview with War Party 2003: 12). To Rex it doesn't matter "what mask you want to put" on God, "he needs to be in your life and in the hardest of times and in the best of times, it's all God or the Creator has pulled me through" (Interview with War Party 2003: 12).

For Rex, religion is synonymous with culture. Rex leans more towards Native spirituality and he was raised in Catholicism, he is a spiritual person. Rex identifies more with Native spirituality because it has taught him about the culture and history of Native people. Regardless of religious or cultural background, Rex believes in having God in ones life. Rex encourages spirituality, but he is very sensitive towards different religions and cultures because of his own complex spiritual identity.

Girlie Emcee also has a complex spiritual identity that has not only been influenced by a combination of religions, in addition she is "part Irish and part Plains Cree" (Interview with War Party 2003: 12). So when I asked Girlie what culture she

identified with as her own, it was translated into a question of race and religion. In terms of her Irish heritage, Girlie says that she was "never ever embraced in the Irish community or really acknowledged in any way, shape or form" (Interview with War Party 2003: 12).

Like Rex she was taught to believe in Catholicism by her mother: "my mom was a victim of residential schooling and she basically clung to what she was taught by the nuns, what they taught her was gold <laughing>. And she really installed a lot of their religion on her children" (Interview with War Party 2003: 12). Note how she choose to call her mother a "victim of residential schooling", Girlie is aware of the assimilation process of residential schools and how it even has an affect on her generation. Although Girlie is aware of the negative affects of residential schools, her upbringing has given her "a greater respect and understanding for different cultures and different religions because they're all really just passed to God" (Interview with War Party 2003: 12).

But concerning her own religious beliefs Girlie identifies with Native spirituality. When she was younger she embraced and participated in the Catholic Church but as she got older she started identifying with her Cree heritage, "realizing I'm Native and I was given my own ways to praise god and I was excited and I was pumped" (Interview with War Party 2003: 12). Girlie's enthusiasm for Native spirituality is matched by her belief in the tolerance of different religions and cultures. She defends her beliefs by asserting that "a lot of people don't understand it, there's nothing evil or menacing behind it, it's all natural and done in a very natural way and I totally embrace that because it's embraced me" (Interview with War Party 2003: 12).

Both Rex and Girlie were raised by parents who were assimilated into the Catholic religion, but as they got older they became to identify more with Native spirituality. What does the religious backgrounds of artists have to do with hip hop? Native peoples in Canada were denied the right to practice their own languages, religions and cultures, and their children were stolen and forced to attend Christian residential schools. The Canadian governments plan was to assimilate and civilize Native people. Therefore, for Rex and Girlie to embrace Native spirituality, they are actively choosing to embrace a heritage that was once forbidden and condemned by the Canadian government. By actively practicing and encouraging the practice of Native spirituality they are actively embracing their Native identity. Furthermore, as many contemporary Native youth on Canadian reservations Rex and Girlie have been influenced by both Native spirituality and Catholicism, and this has given them more respect and understanding towards different cultures and religions.

Kool-Ayd, the third member of War Party, said he identified most with hip hop as his own culture. Kool-Ayd says that growing up he was "always forced to find God", and it was driven into his head that "if you don't go to church you're gonna go to hell"(Interview with War Party 2003: 13). Kool-Ayd says, "I know there's somebody out there, I know there is a being, I'm gonna find him one of these days, but I'd rather just find him on my own, then be told what to do or pushed towards this or that, go to church and stuff like that" (Interview with War Party 2003: 13). And in terms of Native culture, he does attend sweat lodges and "stuff like that" sometimes (Interview with War Party 2003:13). But what he finds that really puts him at ease is hip hop. Kool-Ayd's outlet is writing poetry and the process of creating.

Kool-Ayd even goes so far as to say that, "Hip hop is the most widely accepted culture in this world… When it's hip hop, it's hip hop, it's just a culture, everybodys love" (Interview with War Party 2003: 13). He uses the example that there are Muslims that "do" hip hop and there are break dancers from Japan, despite their cultural differences they are part of the same culture. In his opinion other cultures are not accepting in the same way.

Rex adds that, "It's a culture that replaces a missing culture" and he admits, "I don't speak my language… I speak hip hop like crazy" (Interview with War Party 2003: 13). Although Rex can't speak Cree, he can speak hip hop and he is using this language to express and be proud of who he is. To Rex hip hop is a positive culture that can get youth interested and proud of who they are. Rex states, "We're using hip hop to put who we are out there to get our young people interested in who they are, to get them back to where we're from, and that's the important thing we're using hip hop to look like a resurgence… this resurgence isn't us going to impress other people, it's just us wanting to feel better, it doesn't mean a white person has to feel worse" (Interview with War Party 2003: 12).

The members of War Party have a complex syncretism of religious beliefs between Native spirituality and Christianity, they're racial identities are influenced by the history of colonization in Canada, they practice Native culture and they practice hip hop culture, to them hip hop is a very accepting anti-racist culture, they may not be fluent speakers of Cree but they speak the language of hip hop and use it to express their wonderful complex heritages.

After tackling the concept of culture, I asked the members of War Party how they felt when people say that hip hop belongs to a certain race and whom they would say hip hop belongs to. The members of War Party hold a great deal of respect to the first hip hop artists. In their own music they stay true to themselves and they have come to be embraced within hip hop culture. But in terms of hip hop belonging to anybody, Girlie exclaims "My hip hop belongs to me <laughing>. It belongs to me and nobody can touch that!" (Interview with War Party 2003: 17).

Girlie says that, "We respect them and honor the fact that it was Black music" and that there are a lot of Black people willing to accept that there are other people practicing the culture (Interview with War Party 2003:17). She says, "All of our music is an homage to the great successes of the culture and the history, and where it came from, it's paying homage to that and in no way is it disrespectful" (Interview with War Party 2003: 17). Girlie and Rex do not try to put on a stereotypical rapper persona constantly hollering "yo, yo" or "what's up", they say " We are still themselves". (Interview with War Party 2003: 17).

Rex describes how when they are doing a show on reserve, sometimes they are in isolated communities, elders and parents attend their shows, and they often tell the history of hip hop to their audience. This is how Rex explained that story: "we explain to them what we understand of our culture, of hip hop, hip hop originated in the streets, with the Bronx, spread to bigger cities in the United States and it originated in the ghettoes, the parts of communities… a lot of the time we told them it originated with Black people, give the respect due where it should be, but then we talk about the evolution of hip hop,

why we do hip hop, how we relate to hip hop and how hip hop reflects us and lets us do something positive" (Interview with War Party 2003:17).

For Rex and Girlie, hip hop started as Black music in the Bronx created by the marginalized youth that lived there and the culture has evolved to a global cross-cultural phenomena. The historical narrative of hip hop that War Party tells is most beneficial to their cause, as Native rappers they identify with the empowering nature hip hop had among the first artists in the Bronx and they are a part of the global cross-cultural process of hip hop.

Although I would not argue against War Party's right to practice and create hip hop music, there are those who still question the sincerity and authenticity of their music because they are Native rappers. Rex described an incident where a Native university student e-mailed him, accusing War Party of being 'wannabe Black' and 'wannabe rappers'. Rex sarcastically responded to the insult, by telling the student that "everything I do is Indian… it's never gonna change, anything I do today, tomorrow, whatever, there's always gonna be me there" (Interview with War Party 2003:17). After describing this incident Rex adds, "The streets have empowered themselves and now they're empowering the reserves, and it's a good thing, it's a great thing" (Interview with War Party 2003: 17). Rex is aware of where hip hop began and how hip hop began, he is also aware how hip hop can be empowering and how hip hop has evolved globally. Therefore, when somebody tries to accuse him of being a 'wannabe', he is knowledgeable on the colonial history of Native people in Canada and he knows about the global cross-cultural evolution of hip hop and he knows that hip hop can be used by Native youth as an empowering medium.

War Party is a Native rap group from a reservation in central Alberta, as artists they are using hip hop to empower Native youth. DGC on the other had is a racially diverse rap group from Edmonton, they create hip hop music from their downtown studio and to them hip hop is a culture that is accepting of all races. In the my interview with DGC, I got the most insightful discussion on culture when I asked "what type of relationship is there between hip hop and any other culture?" (Interview with DGC 2003: 12). I probed by asking, what type of relationship there is between hip hop culture and different ethnic cultures (for example, with Latino culture, Black culture, Native culture, Korean culture, etc). The following are their responses to the question:

> "Stray: Right… you know like. <cough> There's more poor people <laughter>. Like it's more of a relationship with poor people. That I've noticed that take it seriously. Who wanna actually do something with it. How expensive is it to break dance? You know all you need is cardboard and maybe somebody that you know that has a ghetto blaster. How expensive is it to freestyle and beatbox? I don't know if there's a… like I guess a relationship between the cultures is somewhat, maybe they go through discrimination, they all feel things of discrimination, they all feel oppression. And I mean in Edmonton you're kind of people, are geared to, "you gotta be like this, you gotta be like that, oh you shouldn't do this, you shouldn't do that". But as far as I'm concerned hip hop is my culture and I represent it by the way I dress, perhaps by the way I talk, I mean and being part Cree, part Scottish, that had nothing to do with it. Culture to me had nothing to do with it as far as Black, Latino goes, I was, I grew up in a situation where I was poor so. And this music and these guys are poor, you know they just happened to be Latinos, they happened to be Black people, they happened wherever or whatever gender or race. So like I kind of came up from the street kind of like that. I had a nice home, my mom made sure I had food and all this kind of stuff, but we grew up on social assistance and I hear that on the music and I'm like "yeah, see I know what these guys are talking about". So I don't know if there was a relationship between different ethnic groups and what not. Even though, cause you can just look at Dangerous Goods we have somebody who's Spanish, somebody who's from Granada, and we have somebody who is Cree. We're all Canadians, and that's a, I guess as much as I can say on that topic.
> (Interview with DGC 2003: 12)

> Dice: So this is a question about race and hip hop? How it affects?
> What's the relationship between hip hop and race? I think in Edmonton it's more what's on T.V, more than anything else for cultural, hip hop or anything. But in

my point of view, in my opinion I came up watching hip hop or listening to hip hop when it wasn't on T.V or it wasn't on any commercial radio, it was just on University stations and stuff. And to me the funny thing is when I first heard hip hop I managed to get a recording of some Spanish hip hop and it astounded I thought, "Wow is that hip hop too?" I was like "I guess because it has the hip hop beats and they're lyrics are, they're rhyming them, but they're in Spanish". And when I first heard that, I thought wow. It started kind of branching out, cause after a while in the early or late 80's early 90's you'd be hearing French hip hop coming out of Quebec and soon enough you were hearing Italian hip hop and just about every hip hop language you could think of. I mean, it's not really if you're poor, the music relates to them because the guys that are doing it had similar experiences in their lives with hip hop. I mean it's just like saying for me, I wasn't poor when I was young, hip hop to me was an escape to make something out of nothing, I guess. And I don't know that's pretty much everything I gotta say. And that's Dice.

Touch: It's Touch. Race and hip hop how does it relate? Well, I don't know I think that hip hop basically has proven that it's able to assimilate any race. Therefore I think that race is never a barrier, so if race isn't a barrier, race is irrelevant basically. And just because where it started there happened to be a lot of this color, and that color and that's just because of where it started. Hip hop is more than where it started, it's grown, so I think it's grown past race. Race isn't an issue. You can express your race through hip hop, but you don't have to. That's what I have to say, Touch.

Angele: Okay. <pause> so I guess you guys wouldn't say that hip hop belongs to any certain race? Because sometimes you hear that, like in media or on T.V or critics, like Black critics will be like "this is our music" and Latino critics will be "this is our music" and Eminen fans will be like "it's white music too". So I guess that's not even a question here.

Stray: I'll continue.

Angele: Okay, go ahead.

Stray: First of all, music doesn't belong to anybody. Music belongs to everybody and it's a language that everybody can relate to, it doesn't matter what, where you come from, who you are, what your gender is, what your language is etc. You play music and it just, people can relate to any aspect, just pick one. Whatever catches their ear. I've listened to music, like there's dance hall music, I have no idea what these people are saying yet I find myself enjoying the music, FULLY. Like even French hip hop, I don't know what their saying, but you know some of it's quite really good actually. Even like you know…I guess for somebody to say that this belongs to us or this belongs to us, I think that's narrow-mindedness because it is something that is growing and music belongs to everybody, you can't

just say that it's yours, in my opinion that's wrong. (Interview with DGC 2003: 13)

Touch: I think that just because. This is Touch by the way <laughter>, that was Stray. Yeah, I think just because the hip hop that you see on T.V and, yeah see on T.V, basically because you don't see a lot of Russian hip hop on T.V or you don't see a lot of Korean groups or a lot of Japanese groups, doesn't mean that it doesn't exist and I think people see what they see on T.V and assume that that is representative of the culture. And it's the most miniscule part of the culture, that' s the funny part, it's the complete opposite, that's the 1% that are like that, that have what they show they have, whatever, you all know what that is, but I just think people should understand that it has nothing to do with what you see on T.V, it's everywhere and you can't stop it.

Dice: This is Dice. It think that what the power's that be, wanna make people believe what rap culture or hip hop is from that's what they'll believe, but that's the general population. But if you're talking in the sense of the artist's point of view, I mean a lot of people say hip hop is Black, it comes from the Black culture, but I mean if you really think about it there's lots of different types of Black people, I mean there's light-skinned, there's dark-skinned, there's really dark, there's Black Spanish people, there's pretty much everything. But I mean I'd say hip hop is more, I don't know…it's more collaborations of nationalities and races that made up the hip hop, I mean hip hop is a lot of different types of music combined, but I mean if you look at it in depth that would take a long time to figure it out but I'd say hip hop sounds similar to Jazz and when I was little my dad used to play a lot of Jazz and it had similar beats and I related to that beat and I picked up on it as well. A lot of things made me pick up on hip hop. But as for the race thing, it was a good beat, I didn't care who listened to it, I just liked it, it was a real good beat and I could relate to that beat because I heard it before. And to me it's nothing really about race it's more to do with what you feel, how you feel the music, I mean everybody feels music in some way or another and they have different opinions of it. But if you can feel hip hop, by all means contribute to scene and that's it. That's Dice." (Interview with DGC 2003: 14)

In the above interview excerpt, I found the dialogue between the members of DGC to be very open and honest. Their dialogue had a great deal to contribute to the understanding of culture, music and hip hop.

Stray first states that he believes that hip hop culture has more of a relationship with poor people than any specific ethnic culture. For Stray those who take hip hop seriously are usually from lower classes. He also points out that participating in hip hop

culture is not very expensive, all you might need to get started is some cardboard and a ghetto blaster. Some people may be involved in hip hop and they may have gone through some discrimination and some oppression. But as far as Stray is concerned hip hop is his culture and he represents the culture by being himself, and "being part Cree, part Scottish had nothing to do with it" (Interview with DGC 2003: 12). Stray says, "I grew up in a situation where I was poor", he related to hip hop artists that rapped about coming from a similar socioeconomic context. Stray may be part Cree, part Scottish and the first hip hop artists may have been Black or Latino, but for Stray he identified more with the class backgrounds than the racial backgrounds of rappers. Furthermore, Stray points out that DGC consists of somebody who is Spanish, somebody who is from Granada and somebody who is Cree, and yet he says, "We're all Canadian". Despite the ethnic and racial differences of DGC, they are all just three Canadian guys trying to make hip hop music.

Stray also has a very strong opinion about anybody claiming ownership over music. He says that "music doesn't belong to anyone" and music "belongs to everybody and it's a language that everybody can relate to", regardless of who you are. For Stray music appreciation is universal, anybody can relate to some aspect of music. Stray even finds himself fully enjoying dance hall music and he even finds himself appreciating French hip hop. Despite the language differences or accents present in different types of music, Stray considers music a language anyone can relate to. Stray considers those who claim "this belongs to us" concerning music, are narrow-minded and wrong for doing so. Stray is a rap lyricist and he also "mixes beats', he is an artist who creates music. In Stray's strong opinion that music appreciation is universal and that music does not belong

to anyone, here he has two vested interests, he consumes music and he creates music. As a Metis hip hop artist who creates and consumes music, Stray first appreciated hip hop music for its creative lyricism (Interview with DGC 2003: 2) and he related to the artist's similar class situation. Stray is an example to his belief that music is a universal language.

Dice had a somewhat different opinion than Stray. First of all, Dice does not believe poor people relate to hip hop better than anyone else. Dice says he wasn't poor when growing up, but "hip hop to me was an escape to make something out of nothing". Dice however does have a similar discourse about hip hop being a language. Dice recalls when the only place you could hear hip hop in Edmonton was on obscure university radio stations. He remembers the first time he heard rapping in his native language Spanish and he was astounded. Later on he started hearing Quebecois French hip hop and Italian hip hop, and from there he witnessed how the art of rapping evolved to other languages; "every hip hop language you could think of". As hip hop evolved to be rapped in different languages, hip hop as a language itself evolved.

Dice describes hip hop from the artists point of view, "it's more collaborations of nationalities and races that made up the hip hop, I mean hip hop is a lot of different types of music combined". Dice is aware that "a lot of people say hip hop is Black, it comes from Black music", but he is also aware that "there's lots of different types of Black people" of different shades, different nationalities and different languages. Therefore, Dice does not buy the argument that "hip hop is Black", because Black itself is a socially constructed racial term and essentializing Black race or Black culture is too simplistic.

Dice enjoyed hip hop music because it was a "good beat" that he could relate to. Earlier in the interview he said "what attracted me most was how the DJ's scratched, that's initially what really impressed me on hip hop music" (Interview with DGC 2003: 3). For Dice relating to hip hop really had nothing to do with race, "it's more to do with what you feel, how you feel the music". This statement is somewhat contradictory of Dice, because he does describe his excitement of first hearing hip hop in his native Spanish which is related to his ethnic background and how he related to hip hop because it was similar to Jazz which he heard as a child. But he also describes how he was first attracted to the unique sound of the way DJ's scratched and this has nothing to do with his ethnic background (Interview with DGC 2003: 3). I do not want to pick apart Dice's racial or ethnic background or identity; the main point is that for Dice relating to hip hop wasn't a racial thing, it was how he felt about the beat and about feeling the music. To Dice it was his creative identity not his racial identity that related to hip hop.

Touch thinks that hip hop culture has "proven that it's able to assimilate any race". I don't think that Touch is saying that hip hop is a colonial culture that is determined to dominate and forcefully assimilate other cultures, what Touch is saying is that anybody can become assimilated into hip hop culture regardless of race. As a culture Touch believes that hip hop is able to adapt and integrate people of different racial backgrounds. For Touch the logic goes, that for hip hop culture "race is never a barrier, so if race isn't a barrier, race is irrelevant basically". Touch also thinks that hip hop "is more than were it started, it's grown, so I think it's grown past race". Hip hop may have begun among certain races, but the fact that hip hop has grown globally to the point where people of every racial backgrounds now practice the culture, for Touch means that

hip hop has grown past racial differences. This belief that hip hop has grown past race may exist only among certain artists, but this belief may not exist for people outside the hip hop community. As discussed earlier, War Party members had to struggle with being a Native rap group and they were even accused of being 'wannabe Black' or 'wannabe rappers'. It appears that for hip hop artists, the fact that people of different nationalities, races and cultures practice the culture, is proof of it's global acceptance. It seems that the global acceptance and practice of hip hop is enough proof that an anti-racist tolerant philosophy exists within the culture.

Stray and Dice also reinforce this philosophy that race doesn't matter in hip hop culture. Stray identifies with hip hop as his culture, he represents by who he is and his racial background has nothing to do with this. For Dice relating to hip hop culture had nothing to do with his race, but how he felt about the music. Stray makes the claim that music does not belong to anyone and it belongs to everyone because it is a language everybody can relate to. Dice says that hip hop has evolved to be rapped to several languages around the globe and through this the language of hip hop has evolved. Relating to hip hop does not necessarily mean relating to ones racial identity, according to Stray and Dice, identifying with hip hop as a culture had to do with relating to the aesthetics and practice of the music.

After asking DGC about the concept of culture, I decided that I would ask them how relevant racial identity is to why someone makes hip hop music. In what I thought was a serendipitous moment in qualitative research I fumbled to ask my race question, my question was spontaneous and far too convoluted be understood to anybody outside of my own mind. I asked "how relevant or appropriate it is to question hip hop artists,

like break-dancers or rappers or whatever, about how their race or culture relates to why they do what they do?"(Interview with DGC 2003: 14). Fortunately, my interviewees were clever and kind enough to answer, and got to the core of my question on race and practicing hip hop culture.

For Touch asking about his racial background may not be relevant to asking him why he is a hip hop artist. If you want to know about Touch's race, his solution is that you listen to his music and you'll understand where he is coming from. Touch also postulates that in a hundred years there well probably be new races, to him race is "too much of a manmade category" and he does not like being categorized (Interview with DGC 2003: 15).

Dice says that hip hop "attracts pretty much every race", because "everyone is doing it these days, it's not really segregated to one race" (Interview with DGC 2003: 15). Although Dice was born into a Spanish speaking family, he says hip hop is "just being yourself" and "it has nothing to do with my race" (Interview with DGC 2003: 15).

Stray asks the rhetorical question, "What is the relation between Native people and hip hop?" (Interview with DGC 2003: 15). This question is important to Stray because he believes that we need more role models, when he was growing up there weren't many Native role models "doing things positive in a commercial perspective" and he didn't know of any Native rappers (Interview with DGC 2003: 15). Therefore, if being a Native rapper and entrepreneur inspires "another Native kid to do something postive with themselves then that's good" (Interview with DGC 2003: 15).

Again Touch displays his dislike of categorization, making the argument that race is a socially constructed category and in a century there will most likely be new

categories of races, and if you want to understand his race then listen to his lyrics. Dice describes how hip hop has attracts every race and that the culture is not segregated to one race, and but his race had nothing to do with him becoming a hip hop artist. Stray's race is relevant to his practice of hip hop music, because as a Native rapper and entrepreneur he can serve as a role model for Native youth. The artists of DGC had different opinions of how their race relates to their practice of hip hop culture. Throughout my interview with DGC it is apparent that all members are aware that race and racialized categories are socially constructed and hip hop is a culture that represents all races and they do not like to be defined by their races but by their artistic skills. Although for Stray if being a positive Native role model is a result of his practice of hip hop than being identified by his race could be a good thing.

In a previous meeting with DGC, I had a chance to talk about hip hop music with Touch and Dice. During that initial meeting Touch described hip hop as a language. While interviewing DGC I asked Touch to elaborate on previous conversation. I asked him "How is hip hop a language and what's makes hip hop a culture in itself?" (Interview with DGC 2003: 16). The following is Touch's response to that question:

> "Touch: It's like a language because it's a way of translating where you're from, what you're doing, what you're feeling and it's a way that…
>
> Stray: Who you are…
>
> Touch: Exactly who you are, what your name is, what you mom's name is, whatever. It's a way that people can relate with, people can understand from all different cultures therefore, I mean you could have Spanish translated into hip hop, just like you can have Spanish translated into English. It's just, that's why it's language because it's unstoppable and it keeps changing and it is never stagnant that's why it's not really good to constrain it and categorize it, you must let it grow and be what it can be, just like any language. (Interview with DGC 2003: 16)"

According to Touch hip hop is a language because it's a way of translating who you are and as a language hip hop is constantly changing and never stagnant, and because of this it is not good to try to constrain it or categorize it. Earlier both Stray and Dice used language as a metaphor, describing music as a language that belongs to everyone and the evolution of the culture that resulted in hip hop being rapped into languages around the globe.

5.3 Conclusion: A Potential for Anti-Racism

In the first chapter of my thesis I made a similar argument, I suggested that hip hop be considered as the way an artist translates mainstream popular culture and combines it with local cultural expression, in the process creating a hybrid cultural form. Following Benjamin's discussion on translation and translatability, I suggested that the translation of hip hop is a mode in itself and that hip hop is the mode of constructing identities within an art form. That the translatability of hip hop depends on how the original mainstream form of hip hop is conceived and in this sense the translator is the hip hop artist. According to Benjamin's argument that " …a translation issues from the original not so much from it's life as from it's afterlife" and that the new translated form of hip hop is as legitimate as the original form. Basically that the cultural authenticity of a localized form of hip hop cannot be calculated, because hip hop culture is in essence a hybrid culture and constantly changing.

If we consider hip hop culture as a language that could be translated into localized forms, than hip hop in Edmonton was translated into experiences of Canadian racialization and racism for a few local artists. According to Bannerji, muliculturalism in Canada is a vehicle for racialization because of its selective modes of ethnicization

(Bannerji 2000:78). Canadian multiculturalism "establishes anglo-Canadian culture as the ethnic core culture while "tolerating" and hierarchically arranging others around it as "multiculture". The ethics and aesthetics of "whiteness", with its colonial imperialist/racist ranking criteria, define and construct the "multi" culture of Canada's others" (Bannerji 2000:78). Afro-Carribean, Cree, Metis, Chilean, African and Japanese hip hop artists from Edmonton describe their experiences of being racialized as 'ethnic others' in Canadian society.

As a Black artist Arlo showed his concern for the hip hop community, in his interview he described how representations of Black youth in media in Edmonton tend to focus on criminal activity and ignore the positive things Black youth are doing in the hip hop community (Interview with Arlo Maverick 2003: 5-7). In his interview Arlo raps lyrics about how "there is a lot of hidden racism in Canada, that a lot of white people won't admit to" but this racism is visible to Black youth and needs to be recognized by white Canadians (Interview with Arlo Maverick 2003:5-7).

War Party also provide a narrative of racialization and racism in Canada towards Native peoples. War Party is using hip hop as an empowering art form for Native youth from colonialism, their syncretic spirituality and lean towards Native spirituality speaks of their revitalization and pride of Native heritage. The members identify with Native culture and hip hop as their own cultures. The members of War Party witnessed how the first Latino and Black hip hop artists used hip hop to empower discriminated urban youth, and they are now using hip hop to empower the reserves (Interview with War Party 2003: 17).

Finally, in several instances Taro described Canada as a white country, describing the main consumers of hip hop as white middle-class youth, and Edmonton as a white blue collar city. Taro did not deny the fact that the majority of Canadians and Edmontonians were white. Despite the fact that Statistics Canada describes Edmonton as the fifth most ethnically diverse metropolitan area in Canada (Statistics Canada 2003), Taro still believes he is living in a white society.

Although most hip hop artists I interviewed in Edmonton did not talk about their experiences with racism and their experiences as visible minorities in Canada, in most conversations theses experiences of racism and racialization were discussed in passing as if they were the norm in Canadian society. Actually, a great deal of laughter and sarcasm surrounded such discussions, facing ignorance through experiences of racism or racialization were considered a Canadian norm that they expressed through humor. Although when racism and racialization were described in experiences of violence, hate or colonization, the conversations balanced between uncomfortable laughter and seriousness.

In my interviews I did not want to racialize my interviewees and question them about what it was like to be a visible minority in Canadian society. I kept my questions open to allow interviewees the opportunity to describe their opinions on race, culture, hip hop, music and media. I wanted to focus my questions around the fact that they were artists and how they situated themselves in the cultural, racial, economic, national, and global landscape of hip hop. I did not want to be one of those social scientist studying an expressive culture, reducing it to "it to expressions of pathology, compensatory behavior, or creative "coping mechanisms" to deal with racism and poverty" or ignoring what these

cultural forms mean for the practitioners" (Kelley 1997: 17). As Kelly points out, "Few scholars acknowledge that what might also be at stake here are aesthetics, style and pleasure. Nor do they recognize black urban culture's hybridity and internal differences" (Kelley 1997: 17-18). I wanted to interview Edmonton hip hop artists, taking into consideration that they were artists, and that their identities were connected to the practice and creativity involved in the music.

Indeed the hip hop artists did not limit their discussion of race to experiences of racism or racialization, instead they focused on how hip hop culture is defined as being accepting of all races, cultures and nationalities. This utopian belief in the colorblind nature was reinforced by the fact that hip hop culture evolved into a global culture, demonstrating it's ability to adapt and integrate to anyone. The hip hop community based it's history on narratives of people coming together because of the music- not because of racial, ethnic, cultural, class differences *or* similarities. The belief in the existence of the Edmonton hip hop community was apparent when collective identities were drawn together by utopian beliefs against racialization, maintaining a culture, a history of pioneering artists, the guidance old cats offered to young cats, the praise given to volunteers, and the pursuit of a common vision and unity. As well, the possibility of an Urban radio station coming to Edmonton was judged by how it would benefit the local hip hop community and culture, specifically how much funding would be available and how could the culture be represented.

The hip hop artists of Edmonton did draw their identities by not only thought their racial, ethnic or class identities, but through their participation in the local hip hop community. Gilroy suggests that music and its rituals be used a model for understanding

identity, suggesting that identity is a lived experience of self, an outcome of practical activity:

> "Music and its rituals can be used to create a model whereby identity can be understood neither as a fixed essence nor as a vague and utterly contingent construction to be reinvented by the will and whim of aesthetes, symbolists and language gamers. Black identity is not simply a social and political category to be used or abandoned according to the extent to which the rhetoric that supports and legitimizes it is persuasive or institutionally powerful. Whatever the radical constructionists may say, it is lived as a coherent (if not always stable) experiential sense of self. Though it is often felt to be natural and spontaneous, it remains the outcome of practical activity: language, gesture, bodily significations, desires." (Gilroy 1993: 102)

Hip hop artists in Edmonton, drew their identities by their practice of the culture and the music. As a few of the artists pointed out, hip hop culture meant just being themselves, it is a culture that is defined by practitioners who 'keep it real'. Hip hop artists gain respect by expressing who they are, who their mama is, where they live, where they are from. Respect cannot be given to an artist who does not stay true to himself and tries to imitate other artists.

Frith explains identity in the context of music and the experience of this form of expression, he states:

> "…in talking about identity we are talking about a particular kind of experience, or a way of dealing with a particular kind of experience. Identity is not a thing, but a process- an experiential process which is most vividly grasped *as music*. Music seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others" (Frith 1996: 110).

The experiential process of practicing hip hop music, is apparent in the way Edmonton artists articulated racial, cultural or ethnic identities. According to artists like Dice, Touch and Stray, the way they feel music and relate to the aesthetics of music was the reason they practiced the music, and it had nothing to do with their racial identities.

Frith continues by saying that his "point is not that a social group has beliefs which it then articulates in its music, but music, an aesthetic practice, articulates *in itself* an understanding of both group relations and individuality, on the basis of which ethical codes and social ideologies are understood" (Frith 1996:111). Hip hop artists in Edmonton believed so much that racial, ethnic, cultural, class or gender differences and similarities did not influence how the community can together, to the point where they despised such man-made categories. In fact, through this process, they came to articulate race as a socially constructed concept to the point where they ignored arguments of racial essentialism.

Frith suggests that social groups do not merely express themselves in their cultural activities "but that they only get to know themselves *as groups* (as particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) *through* cultural activity. Making music isn't a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living" (Frith 1996: 111). Edmonton hip hop artists did not distinguish just their race, ethnicity, class, gender, or cultural background, as the social groups they expressed in their music. But through the cultural activity of practicing hip hop music they described a collective identity as the Edmonton hip hop community. And they did not describe music as just a way to express ideas, but through the community they described highly developed ways of thinking of race and how hip hop was lived through a utopian colorblind culture and through common musical aesthetics. By ignoring racial differences and similarities in the hip hop community, and emphasizing the global cross-cultural nature of hip hop culture, Edmonton artists have a potential for an anti-racist politic. Although artists emphasized that hip hop was just about being yourself, and that the community was colorblind,

despite their denial of trying to overtly being political about anything, there was an underlying politic against racialization. As a culture in itself, the hip hop community of Edmonton stands defiantly opposed to any kind of mainstream racism and racialization.

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5.5 Discography

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Appendix 1: Consent Form

Angele Alook, M.A Thesis Study of Edmonton Hip Hop
September 2003

This is an ethnographic study of the hip hop community of Edmonton. The focus of the study is to explore questions of race, identity and culture among local rap artists. The study is carried out as a Masters of Arts dissertation in Sociology being conducted by Angele Alook. This research aims to ask: How are local identities of race and culture represented among Canadian ethnic minority youth, within the global context of Canadian hip hop and within the context of hip hop's cultural history of expressing the voice of the marginalized? Underlying this question, are questions of how scholars have thought race, culture and identities are represented through hip hop vs. the way cultural practitioners of hip hop feel about race, culture and identity within the subculture.

Hip hop is defined as a culture that expresses the identity, location and marginality of its practitioners. It is within the context of Canadian race relations and hip hop culture that I propose to question the way race, identity and culture are represented in Edmonton hip hop among hip hop artists. Canadian hip hop culture is growing as it's own distinct form within the global context, studying Edmonton hip hop would contribute to the scholarship of hip hop, popular culture, and race relations in Canada. This study will combine ethnographic methods and discourse analysis relying on methods of intertexutality. Through the intextual analysis of interviews, fieldwork, websites, and lyrics, the hope of this study is to understand the discourse of race, culture and identity within hip hop.

The interview will be conducted as a face-to-face open-ended interview, which could last up to an hour. The interview will be tape-recorded and then transcribed. Please understand that your participation is entirely voluntary. All information will be held confidential except when professional codes of ethics or legislation require reporting. If there are any questions that you do not wish to answer, you don't have to answer them. You have the option to stop the interview at any time.

If you have any questions about the study, you may either call Angele Alook, the Principal Researcher at 492-0732 or Dr. Sourayan Mookerjea, the Research Supervisor at the Sociology Department at 492-3384.

DECLARATION
I give permission to be interviewed and for the interview to be tape-recorded. I understand that the final results will be published as an M.A dissertation and that the researcher may also publish articles for academic journals and related conferences.

I agree that I have read and understand the above information. I agree to participate in the above study about my experience and involvement in the Edmonton hip hop community conducted by the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta on behalf of Angele Alook. I understand that the information given by me will be kept in the strictest confidence by the researchers.

_____ (Print Name)

_____ (Interviewee Signature)

I understand that the above study is a cultural study on the popular culture of hip hop and I agree to the use of my stage name in the final results of the dissertation and any other publication by Angele Alook.

_____ (Specify stage name)

_____ (Interviewee Signature)

Appendix 2: Field Notes

May 2003
My Relationship with Hip Hop
My fascination and love of hip hop began in high school when all the boys on my reserve were listening to West Coast gangsta rap, such as Tupac and Snoop Dog. I began to wonder why my peers had any interest in music that came from South Central L.A created by black youth who rapped about gangster life; I thought my peers were just Native boys being silly and trying to be something they weren't. Why were these Native boys on my reserve listening to gangsta rap? Since then I have developed my own taste of hip hop culture and rap music. I've purchased numerous hip hop albums, I've been to several shows featuring successful Canadian and American rap artists, I've gone to several R&B Jams, I've attended hip hop discussions forums, and I've even had debates with friends about what artists create 'real' hip hop and which are just wasting my time. But it wasn't until about 3 years ago that I discovered the essence of the local hip hop scene. I was always a hip hop junkie looking for a place to dance and listen to the most recent jams, and I had heard there might be some people in the city who rapped but it wasn't until I walked down a dark alley down into a club, that I discovered Edmonton hip hop. The club was just off of Jasper Ave and it was called Lush, and every Saturday night they played 'old school' and underground rap in the basement. There people would get hyped up about the music, local emcees would freestyle and battle, the DJ would spin the night away on the turntable and break dancers would impressively take over the floor. What I loved the most about this scene was the diversity of the crowd, and I noticed the emcees and break dancers were predominantly Black, white, Asian and Native.

September 30, 2003
Interview with Arlo Maverick of Politic Live, Urban Hang Suite: CJSR, and Maverick Entertainment
This was my first interview and I felt nervous and insecure at the beginning of it. First of all Arlo showed up late, which wasn't that bad but, the time spent waiting for him was a time I spent building up nervousness and excitement. When Arlo arrived around 10:30 am he looked kind of tired, and I felt I had dragged him out of bed. Afro was hanging out of the sides of his cap and he needed a coffee. I felt my office was a little scary box in an institutional setting, but it was a nice and quite space to record the interview. So after getting a coffee and deciding to have the interview in my office, we began the interview. I was kind of nervous, but I thought I was cool. But the slow awkward deliverance of my first few questions and my shaking hand holding the tape recorder gave me away. Arlo told me not to be nervous; he was more professional and used to interviews than I was. He had experience in giving interviews at the radio station and being interviewed as an artist. One moment I remember, which displayed my amateur skill, was when I looked at my tape recorder while Arlo was talking, which made him stop and look at me and say in a quite concerned voice "oh my gosh, Angele what did you do?". I didn't understand the timer on the recorder and I thought that side of the tape was finished, but it wasn't so we continued.

Arlo was very helpful, interviewing him and talking to him has definitely enriched the scope of my project. As a radio DJ for CSJR, as a promoter in the city, as an emcee and member of Politic Live, as a co-founder of Maverick entertainment; Arlo has a great deal of knowledge of the E-town scene and has contributed a great deal to the community. At the end of the interview Arlo gave me several other contacts that may be helpful in my research and who may be useful to interview.

October 1, 2003
Initial Meeting with Touch and DJ Dice
While discussing hip hop music and the use of sampling in the genre, Touch described hip hop as the music of 'poor people'. He called it poor people's music because they use music and sounds available to them or they steal the sounds that are around them. Also it is poor peoples music because it is not the music of one specific race but the music of people from poor races, this reminded me of Rivera section on 'a ghetto thing'.

Touch also described hip hop as a language. He emphasized how the nature of language is to change. I need to ask him to elaborate on this concept in the interview.

Dice seemed like a historian in hip hop, a historian of E-town hip hop because of his 20 years of experience.

Sunday, October 5, 2003
Interview with Dangerous Goods Collective: Touch, Stray and DJ Dice
The interview took place at their downtown studio. The studio was quite hot inside and there were fans going throughout the interview. One problem I anticipated in this group interview was that distinguishing the voices when listening to the taped interview would be difficult, but the interviewees were very helpful in stating their name before or after they answered a question. This group of hip hop artists come from an older generation of 'old school' and seem to be critics of mainstream hip hop. Dangerous Goods is a culturally diverse group, Touch is of Afro-Caribbean descent, DJ Dice is of Chilean descent and speaks Spanish and Stray is a Metis individual of Cree and (white/Scottish) descent- all are Canadian. All grew up in Edmonton and have "grown up in hip hop". In fact Touch and Stray were influenced by DJ Dice when they were first starting out in rap music. All three are founding members of the hip hop community of Edmonton.

Monday, October 6, 2003
Interview with Poetic Akin
Arlo suggested I contact and interview Poetic Akin, because P.A was one person who helped bring hip hop to E-town. P.A used to DJ a hip hop show on CJSR that contributed to developing a hip hop community and disseminating hip hop to E-town. Poetic Akin is now known as J Smiles and is working on creating his own label and album. I interviewed P.A at 7:30 at the Edmonton Public Library downtown, the interview was very relaxed. P.A spoke about the need to unite the hip hop community, ways he's been hurt by the local hip hop community and his criticism of mainstream hip hop.

October 16, 2003
Progress in Qualitative Research
At this time my main concerns have to do with how I can manage my time: how many interview should I do since my interview list is snowballing? How much of the interviews should I transcribe? How do I manage interviewing and researching a lit review at the same time? Am I doing enough work?
Meeting with an advisor helped me discuss and clear my thoughts on the process of interviewing, writing questions and handling qualitative research. She suggested that I do not have to transcribe word for word verbatim, but listen to the tapes and make notes on common themes and ideas. Also, she suggested I explore the themes of; the dissemination and distribution of hip hop in Edmonton; how is community defined in this context, what are it's boundaries and are they slippery; how are gender relations played out in this community, why are there so few female artists represented?
Other suggestions were to interview War Party, new school/up and coming artists, and female artists. Also suggested was to ask interviewees for demographics; age and race, how does the interviewee define their own racial/ethnic identity.

Friday October 24, 2003 2:00pm
Interview with Taro and Musa at Shogun Entertainment Downtown.
This was a long 2 hour interview, I was let into the house and Taro arrived about ten minutes after me. Musa was with him and was to be in my interview as will. They both said they had something to contribute to my study so I interviewed both of them. Taro is 30 and Musa is 26 years old. Taro has been in the scene for quite a while, he is a Japanese-Canadian who grew up in Edmonton and used to hang out with the 182 crew. Musa is from Africa and is really into conscious rap music, he is very political in his music. The interview was a long debate between the two, Taro being the musician, lover of music/ entrepreneur and producer. Musa being the politically minded lyricist and who believes in the socially conscious voice of hip hop. The political vs. the apolitical, the idealist vs. the realist.

October 27, 2003
I just realized today while listening to Arlo's tape and thinking back at other interviews that there is a struggle between artistic integrity and entrepreneurship, between being real to hip hop culture and making it in capitalist culture, promoting local artist/the underground while not being swallowed up by corporate labels and mainstream media.

Friday October 31, 2003 10:30 pm
Interview with Sharmz, Aliby and Kreisha at South Claireview Hall Halloween Party
I took a train and a bus to get to South Claireview Hall by 9:30 to meet Sharmz. When I got there, I told the people at the door I was looking for Sharmz and they let my partner and I in for free. The hall was filled with teenagers drinking dressed in Halloween costumes. I felt old and out of place, apparently most of the people at this hall party were from Sherwood Park. I called Sharmz several times on his cell phone, but there was no answer. I had spoken to him that afternoon and asked how he looked so I would

recognize him when I saw him, he said he would be the "brown guy with a gotee and him and his crew would be the ones dressed like rappers". Dressed like rappers, I thought while waiting. Finally, I did see a group of youth arriving dressed like a Phat Farm or Sean John advertisement. The interview went by pretty fast and Aliby asked to sign a consent form to be a part of the interview; apparently he is the producer for Sharmz and Kreisha. Kriesha is 18, Sharmz and Aliby are both 21.

Such a cold, cold night, I had to walk 7 blocks in a dress, because I had just come from a dinner party downtown, there were no cabs available and we were stuck way on the north side with no ride. Because of the transportation problems in the city that night I left immediately after the interview, I missed the performance but I did not want to be stuck on the north side on this cold Halloween night.

Monday, November 3, 2003 Hobbema
Interview with War Party: Rex Smallboy, Girlie Emcee, Kool Ayd
Rex and Cindy picked me up at the Health Center in Hobbema. They drove me to their house in their PT Cruiser, it was like any other reserve I had been too, there were nice community facilities and unkept houses. When we arrived at the Smallboy residence, they invited me for breakfast and we sat around talking about reserve life. After about an hour, we went to the basement downstairs and began the interview in their studio. They made me feel very comfortable in their home and they were very professional about the interview and interview questions. Due to War Party's national success and the fact that they openly discuss reserve life in their lyrics, this interview had a very global and political feel to it. Although the interview went pretty smoothly, my favorite part of the interview was at the end when I was interviewing Girlie Emcee alone and asking questions about her success as a female emcee.

November 10, 2003
I wonder how using the interviewees' stage names influences the interview process? Does it affect the way in which the interviewees perceive themselves, the questions and the interviews themselves? I am beginning to think maybe that by using the informants stage names, they are in their stage/celebrity/performer persona when being interviewed. Also, since I am interviewing music artists who are already in the lime light, I wonder if they treat my interviews the way they would treat media based interviews done for magazine articles or radio shows etc.

November 12, 2003
I went to Foosh, a store that sells hip hop gear and vinyl records, to purchase the phattest warmest winter coat and I started speaking to a DJ that works there. He said he gets the best of both worlds by DJing at mainstream and underground hip hop shows. I recognized him from Saturday nights at the Backroom on Whyte Ave and Saturday nights in the basement of Lush about 2 or 3 years earlier, I knew I had seen him in the scene. Anyways, he said one interesting profound thing, he said 'you can't have the underground without the mainstream and you can't have the mainstream without the underground'.

December 18, 2003
Last Wednesday I met with Arlo, he gave me about 25 CDs of local artists to listen to, most of them were not fully labeled, most of them were burnt CD's. Today I listened to most of the tracks. I really liked a lot of the beats on most of the tracks, but I felt thoroughly offended by all the 'bitches and hoes in the club- I fuck lots- suck my dick' lyrics', it was pure torture to listen to these offensive lyrics, these lyrics made me feel immensely violated as a women. It was like being verbally raped, I felt like suing someone for sexual harassment or verbal abuse. Politic Live, DGC, Vision, and War Party, are the only artists that do not make me feel like this all the time, they talk more about real life experiences. I feel that a lot of local artists feel they need to portray 'the thug, hoe-fucking, gun toting, tough rappers' image, someone should tell them that the world is bad enough with just one 50 cent, and if they want to feel that vibe they should listen closely to what Tupac had to say about death, his mama, and prison. Keepin' It Real should be more about reality, than it is about insecure masculinity and ignorant vanity.

January 20, 2004 Hear the Vibe of this City
I'm transcribing today, it's so boring and tiring. I can't believe it is taking me this long, I don't know if I can work any faster on this translation of oral words to written words. Today I am transcribing my interview with Shogun Entertainment, and listening to Taro talk about how he first started getting involved with hip hop heads in Edmonton and the history of his experiences with music, has made me realize how much I don't know and how much more I would like to continue interviewing and collecting local music, but due to time constraints I cannot document every hip hop head and their music that has existed in this city. So I was thinking, to capture the feeling and essence of E-town hip hop, I can compile an audio recording of dialogues (one from each person I interviewed, one speech that stuck out to me) and a song or freestyle from each artist I spoke with, this way people who read my thesis can also feel the vibe of this city.

March 22, 2004 On Being a Woman
As I think back to this past year, going to local hip hop shows, clubs and events, I think back to how what I wore was always a topic in the back of my mind. I remember when I attended "Tha Truth" an Emcee battle with special performances by Politic Live and Darkson Tribe. I wore a white spaghetti strap tang-top with black slacks, high-heeled open toed tanned sandals, a beaded necklace and my hair was down. When I got inside I realized how the combination of white tang-top with self-bra, on brown skin under black light was a loud combination, yelling "look at my chest". It was the first time I was meeting one of my interviewees and I was being introduced to several of the major players in the local scene. Should I have worn a business casual blouse? Was I supposed to look casual, looking like I was 'down' in this scene? Or was I to show some sort of professionalism, avoiding displaying my femininity? Was the white tang-top too revealing? Was I displaying my self as a sex object?

Before that time, I always felt confident 'getting dressed up for the club'. But after that night I was always very conscious on how I was dressed when I meet with interviewees. I always tried to look "fresh and clean", a little casual, a little professional, but I was

always afraid of looking too feminine or dressing pretty. This was mostly due to the fact that I was mostly interviewing young men around my age, who were hip hop artists and part of the club scene. Even though no one ever treated me like a sex object or in any way expressed sexism towards me, the images of rappers in media had unconsciously given me assumptions about 'rappers'. Even during the interview process, I was afraid my laughter or humor would be perceived as flirtation. All of this was in my head, I felt very comfortable with all my interviewees and I was treated respectfully. But the dynamic of being a young women, interviewing mostly young men who were involved in hip hop, made me highly aware of the fact that I am a women. I was highly aware of the fact that I was a young woman asking questions in male-dominated musical subculture. Again, my rapport with all of my informants was very comfortable, but in the back of my mind I was highly aware that I was a women and that I had to keep a balance between professionalism and the casualness required in interviewing. Maybe I suffer from some sort of mental health problem involving paranoia, maybe it was my feminist biases, maybe it was images represented in the media- but my awareness of being a woman was constant.

May 27, 2004
Yesterday I interviewed Stress. It has been about 6 months since I have done any interviews, and I finished transcribing 2 months ago. Now why did I interview Stress? Why did I need one more interview? First of all, Stress had heard about my study and he volunteered to be interviewed in December but we couldn't find the right time to do it, it just never seemed to work out. Secondly, I really wanted to interview Stress because I had heard so many good things about SmashtBenz Studios and about Stress as a producer. Somewhere I heard that he had the most premier professional studio in Edmonton- maybe it was an advertisement somewhere I don't know. Then when I went to the Smashbenz website, I saw a picture of Stress and he was a white dude. This made me want to interview him even more.

Let me explain my ignorant sounding self. After finishing all of my interviews I realized that there weren't many Caucasian people in my sample, I thought maybe because I was an ethnic minority I had more access to interviewees that were minorities as well, maybe my research method of snowball sampling had an unintentional bias which resulted in me ignoring Caucasian hip hop artists. So last week, I contacted Stress because I wanted to make that Vibe of the City CD and I needed technical advice. He explained to me how I could do this and lent me some equipment (such a nice guy might I add). Then we got talking about how we never got to do that interview… and so yesterday I found myself in his studio interviewing him.

The interview went really well. Stress is such a producer, I mean he seems to really love what he does, and he is totally the behind the scenes guy mixing beats and layering music. In the interview, we both mentioned several times that he was a white guy doing hip hop music, I think it was because I was asking questions about race and culture and music. In the end I got the sense, that music is music and if you love it and if you're good at it, nothing else really matters. I hope my questions didn't make him uncomfortable in any way.